ANC

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

SPRING 50c

Edited by Leslie Charteris

Miracle of the 15 Murderers
by Ben Hecht

Butch Minds the Baby
by Damon Runyon

Murder Strikes in Lychgate
by Sax Rohmer

The E-String Murder
by Mignon G. Eberhart

The Detective's Dilemma
by Cornell Woolrich

The Face of Helen
by Agatha Christie

THE COVETOUS HEADSMAN
A Brand New Saint Story by Leslie Charteris

SOME OLD, SOME NEW – THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

This magazine, like so many of the best ideas that have been born into this sinful world, was conceived over a superb dinner and suckled on a bottle of memorable wine. This auspicious combination occurred in Paris too—a town which I have always found especially favorable to the nurturing of dreams.

Taking advantage of my amiably weakened condition, my friend Leo Margulies suddenly said, with the treacherous cheerfulness which he can sometimes assume, "Leslie, why don't we start a magazine?"

"Please," I said. "Not right on top of the crêpes suzettes! Leo, remember, this is Paris, we're supposed to be making like playboys. I know a new bistro where they say the girls have the shapeliest—"

I should, of course, have known that I was licked already. When Leo gets an idea in his teeth he makes a bulldog look like a chihuahua with an oblate inferiority complex. He went right ahead, pointing out pleasantly but firmly that I have been not only a writer but also an omnivorous reader of mystery and detective fiction since shortly after resigning my position as treble soloist in the chapel choir. Finally he pressed home his argument with surprise that I should be selfishly reluctant to share my alleged wisdom with the world and clinched it with an alluring hint of boodle in the offing—a consideration to which I have always been candidly susceptible.

That is why I now find myself with the impressive title of Supervising Editor, gazing upon the first issue of THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE.

In it are some souvenirs of many a happily sleepless night devoted to exploring the highways and byways of criminal fiction, offered to what I piously hope will prove to be an eager public.

The task of assembling and selecting this first group of favorites has been one which I must admit I have enjoyed. But with such distinguished storytellers as Ben Hecht, Damon Runyon, Mignon Eberhart, Sax Rohmer, Agatha Christie and Cornell Woolrich to cull from, it would be hard to convince anyone that I have suffered much pain.

But of course my job has only just begun, for other issues loom ahead. I hope you will like the same sort of stories that have pleased me—not only because of my sordid commercial interest in the success of this venture, but also because I would like to share the enjoyment of these tales with other readers who might have missed them.

This collection also includes a new story of the Saint, which is here being given its world premiere. Lest I should be thought unduly presumptuous for including myself in such Olympian company, perhaps I should explain with all due false modesty that Leo insisted on this feature as a part of my contract. And just to commemorate the origin of our magazine, I have laid its scene in Paris.

—LESLIE CHARTERIS

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Leo Margulies
Publisher

Sam Merwin, Jr.
Editor

Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

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the covetous headsman

by . . . . . Leslie Charteris

Three loves had the haloed sinner, pretty girls, plunder, and a challenging mystery. Valerie North was pretty, her brother's death was a mystery, and there were both money and a murderer waiting to be taken.

"I HOPE, MONSIEUR TEMPLAR," said Inspector Archimède Quercy of the Paris *Police Judiciaire* in passable English, "that you will not think this meeting is unfriendly."

"Nevertheless," Simon replied, in perfect French, "to be summoned here on my very first day in Paris seems at least an unusual distinction."

"The Saint is an unusual personage," said Inspector Quercy, reverting gratefully to his native tongue.

He was a long thin man with a long thin nose and long thin hair. He had a solemn anxious face and wistful eyes like a questioning spaniel. Simon knew that appearance was deceptive. It was the Saint's business, in the cause of outlawry, to know the reputations of many police officers in many places—and he knew that on the record Inspector Quercy's instincts, if the canine parallel must be continued, leaned more towards those of the bloodhound, the retriever and the bulldog.

"If you come here as a simple tourist," Quercy said, "France welcomes you. We have, as you well know, a beautiful country, good food, good wine and pretty girls. They are all at your disposal—for you, no doubt, have plenty of those good American dollars which France so badly needs. But as the Saint—that would be altogether different."

"Monsieur the Inspector is, perhaps, anti-clerical?" Simon suggested gravely.

"I refer, Monsieur, to the *nom de guerre* under which you are so widely known. I have not, it is true, been informed of any charges pending against you anywhere, nor have the police of any other country requested me to arrest you for extradition—but I have read about your exploits. Your motives are popularly believed to be idealistic in a peculiar way. That is not for me to judge. I only tell you that we want none of them here."

"What, no ideals—in the *Palais de Justice?*"

Quercy sighed.

He gazed across his littered desk into the dancing blue eyes under quizzically tilted brows and for a moment the lugubriousness in his own gaze was very deep and real. The sight of the tall broad-shouldered figure sprawled with such impudent grace in his shabby armchair made a mockery of the conventional stiffness of the room, just as the casual elegance of its clothing affronted the hard-worn dilapidation of the furniture.

The warm bronze of the preposterously handsome face seemed to bring its own sun into the dingy room, whispering outlandish heresies of open skies and wide places where the wind blew. Because of this man the office seemed more cramped and drab and dustier than ever and the gloom of it touched the soul of its proper occupant. It was a sensation that many other policemen had had when they came face to face with that last amazing heir to the mantle of Robin Hood, when they knew it was their turn to try to tame him and realized the immensity of the task.

"I mean," said Inspector Quercy patiently, "that there are servants of the Republic, of whom I am one, employed here to concern themselves with crime. If you, as an individual, acquire knowledge of any crime or criminals we shall be glad to receive your information. But we do not allow private persons to take over the duties of the police.

"Still less do we permit anyone to administer his own interpretation of justice, as I hear you have sometimes claimed to do. Furthermore I must warn you that here, under the *Code Napoléon,* you would not have the same advantage that you have enjoyed in England and America. There you are legally innocent until you are proved guilty—here, with sufficient grounds, you may be placed on trial and required to prove yourself innocent."

The Saint smiled. "I appreciate the warning," he murmured. "But the truth is I did come here for the food, the wine and the pretty girls. I hadn't thought of giving you any trouble"—the devil in him couldn't resist adding—"so far."

"Let it remain that way, Monsieur. A vacation does everyone good."

Simon offered a cigarette and struck a light for them both.

"Now that I know how you feel

about me," he remarked, "I suppose I ought to thank you for not trying to pin that Rosepierre murder on me. It must have taken great restraint not to grab such a ready-made scapegoat."

He had been reading the story in a newspaper at breakfast. The body of a young man identified as Charles Rosepierre had been found murdered in the Bois de Boulogne, the spacious park adjacent to the most fashionable residential quarter of Paris. There appeared to be no clue to the murderer or even to the motive, for he was a respectable clerk in a shipping office, vouched for by his employers as honest and hard-working and by his friends and associates as being sober and amiable and impossible to connect with any shady acquaintances.

He carried very little money but he had not been robbed. He had left the office at the usual time on the day he died, apparently with no apprehensions, and it was understood that he was going to have dinner and call later on the girl he was courting—but he had not been seen since until his body was found a few yards from one of the roads through the park.

There was no hint of a jealous rival nor did anything in his open commonplace life give any grounds to believe in a crime of passion. Yet a passion of some weird kind must have been involved. For what lent the crime the eerie touch of horror that justified the space allotted to it in the press was the fact that although he had died almost instantly from a knife stab in the heart, his head had been severed from his body *after he was dead* and was found where it had presumably rolled a few feet away.

"I might have thought of you," Quercy said without the ghost of a smile, "if Rosepierre's body had not been found two hours before your plane landed at Orly. When he was killed and his head was being cut off there is no doubt that you were halfway over the Atlantic."

"It was clever of me to arrive with a cast-iron alibi. You really have no ideas about how I could have faked it?"

"I am satisfied, Monsieur, that that would be beyond even your powers."

"One day I must figure out how it could be done," said the Saint—and in some incredible way he made it sound possible.

The Inspector grunted. "You have not, perhaps, any more constructive suggestions about the mystery?"

"I read a detective story once with a decapitated body in it, in which the head was actually taken from an entirely different body, the object being to confuse the police and no doubt the readers too."

"The medical examination, in this case, proves positively that the head which was found did indeed belong to the body."

"A big part of your problem, then, seems to be to find an answer to why anyone who had already killed someone, for whatever rea-

son, should afterwards take the trouble to cut off his head. It was not done to prevent identification because the head was left there."

"Exactly."

Simon gazed at the ceiling. "Perhaps," he said slowly, "the name of the victim is a clue. Is it possible that you have in Paris some demented aristocrat who is still nursing a grudge for the treatment given to his ancestors during the Revolution? He has made a vow to track down and take vengeance on the lineal descendants of the revolutionary leaders who gave his forbears the radical haircut. Mistaking the name of this unfortunate young man for Robespierre and having no guillotine handy, he—"

There came, perhaps providentially, a knock on the door and an *agent* entered. *"Mademoiselle North est ici, Monsieur l'Inspecteur."*

"Good. I will see her at once. It is the sister of the murdered man," he explained to the Saint.

"Then why is her name North?"

"She was adopted as a child by an American family. It is quite a story." Quercy stood up. "But I must not detain you any longer." He held out his hand. "Amuse yourself well, Monsieur Templar, and remember what I have told you."

"I will do my best," said the Saint and wondered even to himself just what he meant.

* * * * *

He took a long look at the girl who was entering as he went out. She was American, obviously, in every outward particular, stamped unmistakably with all the details of dress and grooming that label the American product to a sophisticated glance anywhere. And since a pretty face is a pretty face in any country within the same broad ethnic limits, there was nothing about her features to mark her as conspicuously French by birth. She had softly waved black hair and clear brown eyes and a wide mouth which in happier circumstances, the Saint's instinct told him, could be generous in many ways.

Simon carried the image of her vividly in his mind as he retraced his way through the musty labyrinth of the upper floors and down the ancient winding stairway to the street. He stood at the gates of the courtyard for a few moments, indulging himself in indecision and knowing all the time that his decision was already made. There was a sidewalk café on the other side of the boulevard. He crossed it and sat down at a table from which he could watch the entrance of the building he had just left.

And so, he reflected cheerfully, it was going to happen to him again.

It was true, as he had told Quercy, that he hadn't come to Paris with any intention of getting into trouble. He seldom went anywhere with the intention of getting into trouble. But trouble had a disastrous propensity for getting into him. It was, of course, originally Quercy's fault for ordering him to report at the Préfecture. The sum-

mons had been most courteously phrased but it had been an order just the same. The Saint had an unpardonably rebellious attitude towards all orders, especially police orders.

That had prepared the ground. And then the Inspector had rashly proceeded to plant a seed. It was not that Simon could legitimately resent his warning, which had been most discreetly and even benevolently phrased—but nevertheless it had the ingredients of a challenge. The Saint had never found it easy to leave a challenge alone. And unfortunately, there was an intriguing murder mystery immediately to hand for fertilizer. Even so, he might have been able to resist—but then he had seen the girl.

It was harder still for him to leave a pretty girl alone. And hadn't Quercy himself invited him to enjoy the pretty girls? And so upon fertilizer and seed and cultivated ground, to conclude the metaphor, had fallen the warm rain of her presence. The result was inevitable, as it had always been . . .

The Saint ordered a Suze, paid for it at once so that he could leave at any moment and waited.

An hour passed before she came out and he got up and threaded his way nonchalantly through the traffic. She stood outside the Palais, looking hopefully up and down the street for a taxi, and Simon timed his crossing so that he arrived beside her as one came by and their hands met on the door handle.

They looked at each other with the surprise, confusion and incipient hostility normal to any two people caught in such a deadlock, the Saint playing his part exactly as if the accident were none of his making. And then he smiled.

"A photo finish," he said. "Shall we flip for it or are we lucky enough to be going the same way?"

She smiled back—he had counted on the sound of a familiar accent to earn that. "I'm going to my hotel—the George Cinq."

"Mine too," said the Saint, truthfully, although his answer would have been the same whatever she had said.

As the cab turned along the Quai des Grands Augustins he knew that she was looking at him more closely. "Didn't I just see you in that detective's office?" she asked.

"I didn't think you noticed," he said. "But I saw you."

"Are you a reporter?"

He considered the possibilities of the rôle for an instant.

"No."

"Are you connected with the police?"

Intuition, which had been whispering to him, raised its voice to a sure command. At this moment, in this situation, with this girl, the truth would gain him more than any fiction.

"My name is Simon Templar."

"The Saint."

She was one of those people whom he met all too seldom, who could hear his name and recognize its connotation without gasping, swooning

or recoiling—and at first, he was glad to see, she received it even without fear. "The Saint," she said, looking at him with no more than ordinary curiosity—and then the fear barely began to stir in her eyes.

"No, darling," he said quickly. "I didn't kill your brother. Even Quercy will vouch for that. He knows I was in an airplane over the Atlantic at the time."

"Do you suspect me?"

"Did you do it?"

"I was on the Atlantic too. On a boat. I landed at Cherbourg this morning. A policeman was waiting for me at the George Cinq."

"Don't let anyone tell you these cops aren't efficient. They sent for me almost as quickly."

Simon lighted a cigarette and gave his hunch one last retrospective survey, for the duration of a long inhalation. His mind was made up.

He said, "This is on the level. Quercy had me in his office, giving me a solemn warning to keep my nose clean while I'm here. So I just naturally have an unholy desire to make a monkey out of him. I like you. And your brother's case is the hottest thing on Quercy's blotter right now. If I could break it and hand him the pieces on a platter it'd be a magnificent moment. And I'm sure you want the case solved, whoever does it. So will you let me help—if I can?"

Her straightforward dark eyes studied him for many seconds. She said, "Thank you. I like you too. But what can you do?"

"I may think of something. First, I've got to know everything you can tell me. May I take you to lunch?"

"Yes—but I've got to stop at the hotel first. They didn't even give me time to see my room."

II

In the lobby, while she was asking for her key, a man stepped up beside her at the desk, removed a rich black homburg with a slight flourish and said. "Pardon, Miss North." He extended a card. Looking over her shoulder, Simon saw that it said *M. Georges Olivant,* with an address in St. Cloud.

"I 'ave waited for you all zis morning," Olivant said. "I am an old friend of your fahzer. I would 'ave met you at ze boat but I was unable to leave Paris because of business."

He was a stout man with a face that was unfortunately reminiscent of a well-fed rat, although the only fur on it was a carefully-trimmed black mustache, the rest of the skin having that glossy pink patina which can only be produced by the best barbers. From the points of his polished shoes, up through his studiously tailored blue suit and studiously manicured fingernails to the top of his pomaded head, he exuded an aroma of cologne and solid prosperity. He spoke English in an aggressive way which somehow gave the impression that he was extremely proud of his accent, which was atrocious. And just as the Saint had liked Valerie North at first glance,

from the first glance he disliked M. Olivant.

"This is quite a surprise," the girl was saying politely. "How did you know about me and how did you find me so quickly?"

"I read about your trip in ze newspapers," Olivant said. "So of course I am waiting for you. Eet was not difficult. Zere are not so many 'otel in Paris where ze Americans descend."

She seemed to take the reference to a newspaper story on her trip so matter-of-factly that a tiny line creased between the Saint's brows. Her name had meant nothing to him and he thought he was aware of most celebrities.

"Then you must have known my brother," the girl said.

"Alas, no. I am in Belgium, on business, when I read ze newspaper. It is ze first I 'ear of you bose since ze war. I mean to look for 'im, of course. But as soon as I return, before I can look, I read in ze newspaper about 'im again, and 'e is dead."

Olivant allowed an expression of grief to dwell on his face for a measured period of time, and then bravely set it aside. " 'Owever, I come to place myself at your service. For finding ze murderers we can only 'ope ze police 'ave success. But anysing else I can do . . . You will, per'aps, 'ave lunch wiz me?"

The girl's eyes went to the Saint and Simon made a faint negative movement with his head.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I've already promised. May I introduce Mr.—"

"Tombs," said the Saint promptly, holding out his hand.

The same kind of impulse that had made him introduce himself with complete candor to Valerie North now made him duck behind the alias which often afforded him a morbid private amusement. But this time his inward smile vanished abruptly as Olivant shook hands. From a man who looked like Olivant he had expected a fleshy and probably moist and limp contact. But the palm that touched his own was hard and rough like a laborer's.

Deep in the Saint's brain a little premonitory pulse began to beat, like the signal of some psychic Geiger counter. But his face was a mask of conventional amiability.

"Mr. Tombs," Olivant repeated, like a man who made a practise of memorizing names. "Zen per'aps bose of you—"

"I don't want to be rude," said the Saint firmly, "but my job depends on this exclusive interview. You know how newspapers are."

M. Olivant made a visible effort to look like a man who knew how newspapers are. "I am desolate." He turned back to the girl. "For cocktails, zen, per'aps? I 'ave look forward so much to zis meeting."

"Excuse me," said the Saint.

He strolled across the lobby to the little newsstand and glanced quickly over its wares. A guide-book with a shiny stiff paper cover caught his eye, and he bought it, and wiped the cover briskly with his handker-

chief while he waited for his change. He walked back, holding the book by one corner, to where M. Olivant was taking his talkative leave of Valerie North.

"I come 'ere, zen, at five o'clock. I 'ave so much to tell you about your poor fahzer, and what 'e does for us in ze Resistance before ze Gestapo take 'im. To sink I 'ave not see you since you were such a leetle girl!"

"I'll look forward to it," said the girl, self consciously letting her hand be kissed, and looked at the Saint. "May I run upstairs just for a minute and see my room before we go?"

"Sure."

As she left Simon showed M. Olivant his book, holding it in such a way that the other was practically forced to take it. "M. Olivant, would you say this was any good?"

Olivant took the book and thumbed perfunctorily through a few pages. "Eet is probably quite 'elpful, Mr. Tombs. So you don't work 'ere all ze time?"

"No, this is a special assignment."

"Ah. I 'ope you make a good story."

"At least it's a chance to travel," said the Saint conversationally. "But I don't suppose that means much to you. From what you were saying it sounds as if you spent most of your time doing it. What sort of business are you in?"

"I 'ave many affairs," Olivant said impressively and seemed to think that an adequate answer.

He held out the book, and Simon took it back again by the corner.

"Maybe you'd let me talk to you later, Monsieur Olivant. You should have some interesting things to tell about Miss North's family."

"Ah, yes, eet is a most interesting story." Olivant seemed curiously uninterested. He extended his hand briskly. "Now, I 'ave anozzer appointment. Eet 'as been a pleasure to meet you. *Au revoir,* Mr Tombs."

The Saint watched him go, with the sensation of that inappropriately calloused hand lingering on his fingers. Then he turned to the concierge and asked for a large envelope, into which he slid his newly-acquired guide-book, being careful not to touch the book again except by the one corner he was holding it by.

* * * * *

"Tell me," said the Saint, "as the most ignorant reporter in this town, what put you in the news. I mean, even before anything happened to your brother."

They sat in opposite armchairs across a table in the tiny downstairs room of the Restaurant Chataignïer, sniffing the savory bouquet of its incomparable *homard au beurre blanc* rising from the plates in front of them, while the chef and proprietor himself uncorked a bottle of cool *rosé*.

"It sounds silly," said Valerie North, "but I was on one of those radio quiz programs. I happened to know the answer to who was the painter of the Mona Lisa and the prize I won was a free trip to Europe.

They asked me what I planned to do with it and I said it'd give me the chance I'd always hoped for to get to know my brother."

"It does sound a little unusual," Simon admitted. "Hadn't you ever met?"

"Not since we were kids. We were born and lived here till nineteen forty, when the Germans were advancing on Paris. I was too young to remember much about it but everyone was very frightened, and my father said we must go away. He wouldn't go himself but he sent us with the wife of a neighbor—my mother died when my brother Charles was born. Somewhere on the road we were strafed by a plane and the woman was killed. Charles and I went on alone."

"Was he much younger than you?"

"Two years younger. But we were both only children. Somehow, presently, we got separated. Somewhere after that I was picked up by an American couple who took me to Bordeaux, then afterwards to America. They were sweet people—they still are—and they hadn't any children, and they treated me like their own. Later on, they were able to find out somehow that my father had died in a concentration camp. They adopted me legally and I took their name."

"So for all practical purposes you really are an American."

"I went to school in Chicago—Mr. North is an accountant there—and now I'm a secretary in a mail-order house. And the only French I know is from high school."

"Who was your father?"

"All I know about him is his name, Eli Rosepierre. He was some sort of working jeweler."

The Saint paused with his wine-glass halfway to his lips. "Was he Jewish?"

"I think so."

"I told Quercy there might be something in the name," he observed. "Of course the name Eli fixes it. Now I get the Rosepierre. A literal translation of Rosenstein. I wonder . . . He must have been very brave or very foolish to stay here with the Nazis coming."

"Perhaps he was only optimistic," she said. "You know, I'd never thought of that, about the name."

"Was he rich?"

"I don't think so. He worked very hard. But he may have been thrifty. I don't really know. As far as I can remember we lived in an ordinary decent way, not poverty-stricken and not specially luxurious."

"But it's at least a possibility."

"What difference does it make? Whatever he had, the Nazis must have confiscated."

"If they could find it."

"I suppose," she said, "you're looking for a motive."

"There must be one. And I've got to find it."

She watched him subdividing the last succulent pieces of lobster with loving regret.

"When did you locate your brother again?" he asked.

"Only a few months ago. The

Norths had tried from time to time without any luck. Last winter I thought I'd try just once more on my own. I had an advertisement translated into French and sent it to all the Paris newspapers. Of course, for all I knew, he might have been anywhere else in France if he was alive at all. But by a miracle he saw it. We exchanged letters and snapshots. He'd thought I was probably dead too. And then, when I won that prize on the radio, it seemed as if everything was set for a real Hollywood ending."

"I can see why that story would get a play in the papers," said the Saint thoughtfully. "And the correspondents of the French news agencies would naturally pick it up and send it back here."

"They did. Charles' last letter said he was quite embarrassed about the publicity he was getting."

"So after that, anyone with any interest in the Rosepierre family, whether they read advertisements or not, would know a good deal about both of you."

"I suppose so."

Simon shamelessly used a piece of bread to mop up the last delectable traces of the ambrosial sauce. "Are you reasonably sure that this Charles Rosepierre *was* your brother?"

Valerie stared at him. "He *must* have been! I mean, he seemed to remember the same things I did. And people here knew him by that name, didn't they? And there's quite a resemblance—look!"

She took out her wallet and extracted a photograph which she passed to him. It showed a dark, rather delicate-featured young man with an engaging smile. Simon dispassionately compared it, detail by detail, with the face of the girl opposite him.

"There's a great likeness," he conceded finally. "It's probably true. I was only groping in the dark."

"Here's another thing." She was fumbling in her purse again and she came out with a small round piece of silver like a coin. "My father gave it to me just before he sent us away. It's one of those things that stand out in this disjointed kind of childhood memory. He gave both Charles and me one. And Charles mentioned it in his first letter answering my advertisement. He said he still had his and wondered if I still had mine."

"That's pretty convincing."

Simon took the piece of silver and looked at it and a slight frown of puzzlement began to wrinkle his forehead.

"But if he was Jewish," he said, "why a Saint Christopher medal?"

She shrugged. "Maybe he'd been converted. Or maybe he hoped it would bluff the Gestapo if they caught us."

"Or maybe," said the Saint, in a faraway voice, "it was just the handiest thing he had in the shop."

She gazed at him blankly while he examined the medal more closely and turned it over, half hoping to find some inscription on the back. But on the back was only a little quarter-inch indented square, much

like a hallmark, except that the indentation was filled only with what looked like a cuneiform pattern of microscopic scratches which conveyed nothing to the keenest naked eye, if they had any significance at all.

And yet, for the first time, the darkness in which he had been groping did not seem so dark. There were vital pieces missing in the jigsaw he was trying to put together but at last he was beginning to perceive the outlines into which they would have to fit.

He was very silent while they finished the meal and the wine, so that by the time he called for the check the girl was fidgeting with understandable impatience.

"May I keep this just for a few hours?" he said at last and dropped the medallion into his pocket without waiting for her permission.

"Have you thought of anything?" she asked.

He stood up. "A lot of things. I'm not tantalizing you just to be mysterious but they'll take the rest of the afternoon to check on and I don't want to raise any false excitement until I've got facts to go on."

He walked with her to the Boulevard Raspail, the nearest thoroughfare where they would be likely to find taxis, and only his quiet air of being so absolutely certain of what he was doing somehow forced her to control her exasperation.

"I'm telling the driver to take you to the Place Vendôme," he said, as he opened the door of the first cab. "You'll find dozens of fascinating shops in all directions from there, which will keep you amused until your feet hurt. At five o'clock, wherever you are, grab another taxi and tell him to take you to a restaurant called Carrère, in the Rue Pierre Charron. Will you repeat that?" She did so. "I'll meet you there at the bar. Until then you must not on any account go back to the George Cinq."

"But why not?"

"Because as long as you're just wandering around the town the killer isn't likely to bump into you. At the hotel he knows where to find you. And I like your head where it is. I don't want it cut off."

Her eyes grew big and round. "You don't think it could happen to me?"

"I'll answer that when I know why it happened to your brother. Meanwhile, don't take any chances."

"But remember, I promised to meet that Mr. Olivant at five-thirty."

"I want to be around when you do it. That's what I'm talking about."

Her breath broke in a gasp of incredulity. "You mean you suspect *him?*"

"Darling," said the Saint, "this isn't one of those story-book mysteries with half a dozen convenient suspects. I've known ever since friend Olivant showed up that he had to be a good bet. The only problem still is to find the motive and prove it on him."

He closed the door gently after

her and turned towards the next cab.

III

On a narrow street near the Odéon he found, unchanged as if the German occupation had only ended yesterday, a little stationery and book shop which in those days would have earned a spot promotion for any Gestapo officer who had uncovered its secrets. Simon Templar went in and stood browsing over the titles on the shelves, while the jangling of the vociferous little bell hung on the door he had opened died away into silence. He heard a scuffle of footsteps at the back of the shop, and a voice he recognized said courteously, "*Bon jour, m'sieu.*"

Without turning the Saint said in French, "Do you have, by chance, a copy of the poems of François Villon?"

There was an instant's pause and the dry voice said mechanically, "I regret but today there is so little demand for those old books."

" 'But where are the snows of yesteryear?' " Simon quoted sorrowfully.

Suddenly his elbow was seized in a wiry grip, and he was spun around to face the proprietor's sparkling eyes. "*Mon cher Saint!*"

"*Mon cher Antoine!*"

They fell into an embrace.

"It is so many years, my dear friend, since I have heard that password!"

"But you remembered."

"Who of us will ever forget?"

They held each other off at arm's length and the years fell away between them. And as Simon laughed in the face of Antoine Louvois it was heart-warming for him to remember that this frail-looking gray man had been the redoubtable Colonel Eglantine of the *maquis,* whose exploits had perforated the intestinal tracts of Himmler's minions with even more ulcers than bullets. And he thought again that only a French hero would have had the sense of humor to hide his identity behind the name of a delicate flower. Those days, when the Saint's commission from Washington had been as tenuously legal as anything in his career, seemed very far away now —but it was good still to have such a friend.

"What brings you back, *mon cher ami?*" Louvois asked. "We shall have much to talk about."

"Another time, Antoine. This afternoon I am in a hurry."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"That is why I came."

Louvois relaxed into instant attention. As if not a day had passed, with a sobering of expression too subtle to define, he was again the sharp-witted coldblooded efficient duellist of the last war's most dangerous game.

"*Je suis toujours à ta disposition, mon vieux.*"

"Was there, in the Resistance, a man named Georges Olivant?"

"What is he like?"

Simon described him.

"There were so many," Louvois

said, "and under so many names. I do not recall him myself. I can make inquiries."

"On the other hand he may just as well have been a traitor."

"There were many of them also, and many of them also have thought it wise to change their names. But that might be a little easier to trace."

Simon put down the envelope which he still carried, into which he had put the guide-book with the conveniently shiny cover which Olivant had handled.

"On the cover of this book," he said, "are the fingerprints of this man. But cut off the top lefthand corner, which has my own prints."

"That will make it very easy if his prints are on record."

"You still have friends at the Préfecture?"

"Naturally."

"I do not want this to become known to Inspector Quercy, of the *Police Judiciaire.*"

"He is a good man."

"There is a personal reason."

"*Entendu.* He will know nothing about it."

"It is urgent."

"I will close the shop and take the book over at once myself. I will have a report for you within two hours."

The Saint fingered the medallion in his pocket.

"There is one other thing I can do while you are gone," he said. "Do you have an accommodating friend who is a doctor, who would have a microscope that I can use for a few minutes?"

"I can find one. Let me telephone first."

Louvois retired to the back of the shop and returned in a few minutes with a name and address written on a slip of paper.

"It is all arranged. He is expecting you."

"Thank you, Antoine. I will come back and wait for you. *A tout à l'heure.*"

"*A tout à l'heure.*"

Simon walked to the address, which was only a few blocks away. The doctor, a taciturn man with an old-fashioned spade beard, showed him directly into a small laboratory and left him there, asking no questions except whether the Saint knew how to operate the microscope and whether he required anything else.

The Saint placed the Saint Christopher medal face down on the platform, centered the square indentation on the back under the objective and aimed the light on it. As he adjusted the focus, the pattern of almost invisible scratches sprang to his eye as legibly as a page of print.

He read the words so painstakingly engraved there—and then he lighted a cigarette and sat back on the stool and knew the answers to many questions, while pictures formed for him in the drifting smoke.

He saw old Eli Rosepierre in his workshop, knowing that the Germans were coming and too proud or too disheartened to run away but

wanting to save his children. And knowing that it was hopeless to trust them with such jewels and gold as he could lay his hands on, even though they would be lost to him anyway, but wanting to give them something that the invaders could not touch, something for the future. And knowing that the children were too young to be relied upon to understand or to remember anything he might tell them about the modest wealth that was still secure. And faced with the problem of giving them the key to it in a form which they might understand some day but which would be least likely for a child to destroy.

Anything on paper, of course, was out of the question. It was too easy to mutilate, or to deface or to lose—or a finder could read and take advantage of it. A tattoo might have done but Rosepierre was not a tattooer. He was a jeweler.

And he had found a jeweler's solution.

Simon saw the old man working through the night with aching eyes, carving the most important achievement of his engraver's art. The etching of the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin was a mere abstract diversion by comparison. This was his testament. On a medallion, because it was most indestructible—of silver only because it would be least likely to attract a thief—of St. Christopher because it might disarm racial persecutors and because it might be treasured more carefully—as indeed it had been.

The Saint took out the slip of paper with the doctor's address and copied down the words from the medal on the other side.

Then, more for idle physical distraction than anything, he wrote the English translation underneath.

There was only one weakness in Eli Rosepierre's ingenious idea. Why would his children ever have been likely to discover the minute engraving on the backs of their good-luck medals?

And in the next flash, Simon knew the answer to that one too. There must have been someone whom Eli Rosepierre trusted, to whom Rosepierre had given an inkling of his scheme, whom Rosepierre had charged to find the children again, if it were ever possible, and tell them what to look for.

Olivant.

Simon thanked the doctor, who still asked no questions, and went back to Louvois' little *papeterie*. He paced up and down the street and almost wore himself out before the old guerrilla fighter returned. But the springy gait of the retired *maquisard* gave him his answer even before Louvois spoke.

"We have success, *mon cher!*"

Louvois insisted on unlocking the door and entering the shop before he would say any more.

"The fingerprints are those of one Georges Orival, *mon cher Saint*. He was a collaborationist and for that he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison."

"He has escaped or more probably been released," said the Saint. "And he is looking very prosperous, under

the name of a M. Georges Olivant."

"No doubt the *sâle type* had plenty of blood money hidden away before they caught him."

"He is now preparing to collect a lot more."

Louvois stroked his chin meditatively. "Perhaps that can be prevented. There are still many of us who do not think that imprisonment was enough."

"*Ne t'en fais pas,*" said the Saint. "His goose is practically cooked already. I personally guarantee it. I must go now and take care of him, but as soon as this is finished we shall have our reunion."

* * * * *

To his relief, although he had consciously tried to reassure himself that he had nothing to worry about, Valerie North was waiting at the bar of the *Carrère,* as he had instructed her. He ordered a Martini to keep her company while she finished hers and paid the tab, but he would not talk even though the bar was deserted at that hour.

"All the bartenders in this area speak English," he said, "and I don't want to risk even a chance of future complications. Our caravanserai is just around the corner but I didn't want you to go there alone."

As soon as they had finished he steered her down the street to the Avenue George V, and turned her quickly into the George V Apartments, just before the hotel entrance. They rode up to her floor in the elevator of the apartment wing and he piloted her expertly through the connecting passage to the hotel section.

"Don't ask me how I know these back ways," he said. "I couldn't tell you without incriminating myself. As far as you're concerned it's good enough to fool anyone who's naturally expecting you to use the hotel lobby."

He found a chambermaid to open the door for them with a passkey. Inside she fetched up short with an exclamation, so abruptly that he trod on her heels.

The room was a shambles. Her two suitcases were open, the contents strewn all over the bed, the other furniture and the floor. But he was not seriously surprised.

"Did you try to unpack in a hurry when you ran up before lunch?" he inquired calmly.

"Of course not! Who would unpack like this? There's been a burglar here!"

She ran aimlessly about, rumaging among her disordered effects.

"Don't get excited," he murmured. "I don't think there's any harm done that a little ironing won't fix. If you'd been here yourself it might have been very different."

"I haven't got much jewelry," she protested, "but—"

"I expect it's all there," he said. "The one valuable piece was safe all the time."

He held out the St. Christopher medal.

She took it, and stared at him. "You've got to talk now," she said.

"If you don't I'll go crazy—or do something I may be sorry for."

"I'm ready now," he said. "Turn that medal over."

"Yes."

"You see that little square impression in the back?"

"Yes."

"I put it under a microscope this afternoon. There's fine engraving in it. Here's a copy that you can read."

He gave her the scrap of paper on which he had written down the inscription and its translation. While she looked at it, he cleared a space on the bed and sat down and lighted a cigarette. He felt very placid now.

She read:

I, Eli Rosepierre, bequeath to the bearer, for whom this shall be sufficient identification, one half of the $50,000 which I have on deposit at the Chase National Bank, New York.

Eli Rosepierre.

"You see," he said, "you're moderately rich. Your father was lucky enough to have some assets that the krauts couldn't reach."

Her face was a study. "Then Charles's medal—"

"Must have been a duplicate of that one, leaving him the other half."

She sank unsteadily into the nearest chair, ignoring the clothes which she crushed underneath her.

Simon laughed, and got up again to give her a cigarette.

After a full minute, she said, "Where is the other medal now?"

"I expect your brother's murderer has it. But he hasn't had time to do anything with it. Besides, he won't be satisfied until he has both of them."

"Why hasn't he done anything until now?"

"Because he couldn't. Your father trusted at least part of his secret to a friend whom he trusted, named Georges Orival. But Orival turned collaborationist. After the war he was tried and imprisoned. He only recently got out and he hasn't wasted much time. He introduced himself to you as Georges Olivant."

"Olivant!"

"Apart from his obvious phoniness," said the Saint, "I knew I had something when I shook hands with him. He looks like one of the idle rich but he has corns on his hands like a laborer. He didn't get them from pottering about in his garden. He's been doing several years at hard labor."

The girl's hand shook a little as she drew at the cigarette. "And he's waiting for me downstairs!"

"I'm sure it would take a lot to keep him away."

"We must tell the police!"

"Not yet. We still haven't got enough evidence for a murder charge against him. And we still want that other medal. So we're going to meet him just as if you didn't expect a thing."

"I couldn't!"

Simon Templar gazed down at her with level blue eyes in which the steel was barely discernible.

"You must, Valerie. And you

must go along with anything I say, no matter how absurd it sounds. You said you'd let me help you. I haven't done badly so far, have I? You've got to let me finish the job."

IV

M. Georges Olivant folded the evening paper he had been reading and tucked it into his pocket. "Eet say 'ere," he said, "ze police 'ave learn nozzing new about ze tragedy of your brozzer. But do not fear. Zey are very pairseestent. Soon, I am sure, zey will 'ave ze clue."

"They know more than they're saying for publication," Simon remarked. "They told me so."

He wanted to draw Olivant's attention to himself, not only to turn it away from Valerie North's pale stillness.

"So, you 'ave talk wiz zem?"

"And I've got a few leads of my own."

"I 'ave read American stories," Olivant said, "where ze reporter is always a better detective zan ze police. You are per'aps one of zose?"

"Sometimes I try to be. Anyway, at least the motive for the murder is known."

"Eet is?"

Simon took a leisured taste of his cocktail. "Miss North's father—and the father of Charles Rosepierre—had a nice piece of change stashed away in a New York bank. He made a will leaving it equally between them. A rather unique kind of will. It was engraved in microscopic letters on the backs of two St. Christopher medals, one of which he gave to each of the children. Miss North's medal has already been deciphered. Here's a copy of the inscription."

He gave Olivant the scrap of paper and tasted his drink again while the man read it. The girl's knee touched his inadvertently under the crowded table and he felt it tremble. He tried to quiet her with a comforting pressure of his own.

He had to admit that Olivant was good. The man's face did not change color, and the dilation of his eyes could be explained on perfectly legitimate grounds.

"Eet is amazing!" Olivant ejaculated. "Eet must be, as you say, unique. So, of course, poor Charles was kill to steal 'is copy!"

"You'd make a good detective yourself."

"But eet still does not say, by *'oo!*"

"I've got ideas of my own on that score."

Olivant's eyebrows rose in arches towards his well-oiled hair. "What ees zat?"

"I've been talking to a fellow I met who used to be a big shot in the underground. We've got a hunch that there's some connection with somebody that Rosepierre trusted, who went wrong and turned the Nazi way—who may even have betrayed Rosepierre to the Gestapo. But if they tortured him he must have died before he'd write them a check on that New York bank!"

For the first time Simon saw the crawl of fear beneath Olivant's sleek surface. It was no more than an infinitesimal twitch, instantly smothered. But it was all that he needed.

"Eet is too 'orrible to sink about," Olivant said. He turned to the girl. "Your fahzer was such a wonderful man. Everyone love 'im."

"You can't think of anyone who might have turned on him?" she managed to ask.

"I could not think of anyone 'oo would be so bad!"

"My Resistance friend thinks he can," said the Saint. "Anyway, he's making inquiries."

Olivant picked up his glass and drained it and wiped his mouth. "I 'ope wiz all my 'eart zat 'e succeed," he said. "But we make Miss North upset again wiz zis talk. I see it. Instead to remind 'er of 'er poor fahzer and 'er poor brozzer, we should try to make 'er forget a leetle. Now, I 'ave ze idea. I 'ave my car. Tonight it would be nice to drive out to St. Cloud, to my 'ouse, where we 'ave a nice dinner, and per'aps 'elp ourselves to feel better."

Valerie looked at the Saint desperately but Olivant might have been anticipating the glance. "Of course," he said, "if Mr. Tombs is not engage I am most 'appy if 'e come also."

It was precisely what the Saint would have predicted and the sheer cosmic inevitability of it gave him the same feeling of Olympian omnipotence that a master dramatist must experience as he sees the last loose ends of his play falling into place with flawless accuracy in the third act.

"I think that's a swell idea," he said.

He was afraid even then that Valerie would rebel but terror seemed to have built up in her until she was gripped in a kind of trance that left her without volition.

They drove with Olivant at the wheel of a glistening new car, all three of them pressed together in the front seat so that Simon could feel the rigidity of her body against him shaken by an occasional shiver. He knew that Olivant must have felt it too, though the man chattered incessantly about nothing and Simon did his best to help keep the empty conversational ball rolling.

Once, while they were still passing through the Bois de Boulogne, Olivant broke off in the middle of a sentence and said, "Are you nervous, Miss North? Believe me, I drive most careful."

"I guess I'm just overtired," she said. "Or else I'm catching a chill."

"I know, you 'ave 'ad a shocking day."

She turned to the Saint, leaning closer to him. "Where are we?"

He hadn't wanted to refer to it, but he had to. "The Bois de Boulogne," she repeated after him. "Where Charles was—"

"Please," Olivant said quickly. "For a leetle while, try not to sink of un'appy sings."

"Now that it's come up," said the Saint in a very even tone that tried unobtrusively to transmit

some of his strength to her, "I must ask you one more question. About those medals, Valerie, that your father gave you and your brother. He didn't just give them to you to put in your pockets, did he? How were you supposed to wear them?"

"They were on silver chains," she said expressionlessly. "He must have riveted them or welded them or something. At least, I know that mine had no catch that you could undo and it was too small to come off over my head. I wore it day and night for years. Finally when I got older I had to have the chain cut, because I had other necklaces I wanted to wear and I couldn't wear that one all the time."

Simon drew a deep breath. "That's the last answer," he said softly. "That explains everything. Of course, he had to take the least possible risk of your losing them. And because your brother didn't have to be bothered about other necklaces, he never had his chain cut. He was still wearing it when he was killed.

"And all the murderer had was a knife. People don't normally carry wire-cutters or a hacksaw or a file when they set out to commit a straightforward murder. It hadn't occurred to him that the chain wouldn't unfasten. And it was too strong for him to break with his hands and too small to take off over the head. So the only way he could take it, on the spot, was to—"

"*No!*" the girl cried out and buried her face in her hands.

The car seemed to swerve a trifle. "I am ashame for you," Olivant said harshly. "'Ow you can 'urt Miss North like zis?"

"I'm sorry," said the Saint.

But he wasn't, for the answer to that last question, the mystery of why Charles Rosepierre's head had been hacked off after he was dead, had to be known. But he knew now and there were no more questions. With certainty came a lowering kind of peace.

Olivant's house was not large but it stood well back in what appeared to be moderately spacious grounds, which looked overgrown and unkempt, about halfway up the hill from the river. The interior was somber and smelled damp, as if it had lacked the warmth of human occupancy for a long time. Simon was sure that it had.

Olivant ushered them into the heavily furnished drawing-room and turned, rubbing his hands. He seemed to have recovered his overpowering confidence and his smile was fat and expansive.

"Now," he said, "we are going to be 'appy. What will you 'ave? A cocktail? Sherry? I make you a drink and zen I make dinner. I 'ave no servant tonight but I am very good chef."

"Living alone and liking it, eh?" said the Saint mildly.

"Yes. Tonight eet is just ourselves."

Simon put out his cigarette. He could enjoy the full flavor of a situation as well as anyone but he knew that there were occasions

when not to prolong the enjoyment.

He put a hand into his coat pocket as if reaching for another pack of cigarettes but it came out with a stubby blue-black automatic.

"In that case we won't put you to a lot of trouble, Monsieur Orival," he said pleasantly. "All we want is Charles Rosepierre's medallion."

"Are you crazy, Templar?"

The Saint smiled. "I see you know my real name. You only had to ask a few questions at the hotel. It was a little harder for me to get yours but your fingerprints on that guide-book were a big help."

The man's face turned gray. "My name ees Olivant. Zis is an outrage!"

"It's going to be a worse one," said the Saint cheerfully, "if we don't get that medal. Hand it over, or shall I shoot you in the stomach and look for it myself?"

Orival licked his lips. "Eet is in my safe," he said at last. "Be'ind zat picture."

"Go and get it."

Orival manipulated the dial and the door opened. He reached in.

He should not have been so conventional as to turn around with a gun in his hand. Simon was expecting it and ducked. Orival's one shot went wild but the Saint's did not.

Then the french windows burst open, and Inspector Quercy walked in.

* * * * *

"*Enfin,*" Quercy said stolidly when the facts that he did not know had been told to him, "Miss North has both the medals and she should be able to claim the inheritance without too much difficulty. And we have this *canaille* but not in the condition that the State would have preferred." He signed to the two uniformed men who had followed him in. "Remove it."

"The State ought to thank me," said the Saint, "for saving you the expense of a trial and execution."

"It is lucky for you," Quercy said, "that I saw what happened, and know that you fired in self-defense. We have, of course, been following Miss North to see if the murderer might approach her."

Simon glanced surreptitiously at the open safe, then at the windows through which the two *agents* had just disappeared with their unlamented burden.

"By the way," he said, "just to complete the record, I think Orival still had the murder knife in his pocket."

"Yes, we shall need that for the police museum."

Quercy hurried out after his men. He was back in a few minutes.

"For once you were mistaken, *Monsieur le Saint*. It is not on him."

Simon shrugged. "Well, I guess he got rid of it."

"It is not very important."

Simon Templar agreed. What was important, to him, was that in those few minutes he had been able to transfer the negotiable contents of the late Georges Orival's safe to his own pockets. He caught the girl's eye and he knew that her sense of humor was coming back.

butch minds the baby

by . . . Damon Runyon

When an ever-loving father takes his infant son on a safecracking job things wax more than somewhat.

ONE EVENING along about seven o'clock I am sitting in Mindy's restaurant putting on the gefillte fish, which is a dish I am very fond of, when in comes three parties from Brooklyn wearing caps as follows: Harry the Horse, Little Isadore and Spanish John.

Now these parties are not such parties as I will care to have much truck with, because I often hear rumors about them that are very discreditable, even if the rumors are not true. In fact, I hear that many citizens of Brooklyn will be very glad indeed to see Harry the Horse, Little Isadore and Spanish John move away from there, as they are always doing something that is considered a knock to the community, such as robbing people, or maybe shooting or stabbing them, and throwing pineapples, and carrying on generally.

I am really much surprised to see these parties on Broadway, as it is well known that the Broadway coppers just naturally love to shove such parties around, but here they are in Mindy's, and there I am, so of course I give them a very large hello, as I never wish to seem inhospitable, even to Brooklyn parties. Right away they come over to my

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Damon Runyon, alas, is observing the likes of Little Isadore and Harry the Horse in some celestial Mindy's. But the guys and dolls he created still talk their strange lingo on both the Broadway stage, in Hollywood and on innumerable television screens. Perhaps no Broadway characters spoke actual Runyonese in the days when he was writing of their eery antics—but more and more of them are beginning to sound like Runyon people as time goes by. There is no greater accolade for any author.

From Guys and Dolls, published by J. B. Lippincott Co. Copyright 1929, 1930, 1931 by Damon Runyon

table and sit down, and Little Isadore reaches out and spears himself a big hunk of my gefillte fish with his fingers, but I overlook this, as I am using the only knife on the table.

Then they all sit there looking at me without saying anything, and the way they look at me makes me very nervous indeed. Finally I figure that maybe they are a little embarrassed being in a high-class spot such as Mindy's, with legitimate people around and about, so I say to them, very polite:

"It is a nice night."

"What is nice about it?" asks Harry the Horse, who is a thin man with a sharp face and sharp eyes.

Well, now that it is put up to me in this way, I can see there is nothing so nice about the night, at that, so I try to think of something else jolly to say, while Little Isadore keeps spearing at my gefillte fish with his fingers, and Spanish John nabs one of my potatoes.

"Where does Big Butch live?" Harry the Horse asks.

"Big Butch?" I say, as if I never hear the name before in my life, because in this man's town it is never a good idea to answer any question without thinking it over, as some time you may give the right answer to the wrong guy, or the wrong answer to the right guy. "Where does Big Butch live?" I ask them again.

"Yes, where does he live?" Harry the Horse says, very impatient. "We wish you to take us to him."

"Now wait a minute, Harry," I say, and I am now more nervous than somewhat. "I am not sure I remember the exact house Big Butch lives in, and furthermore I am not sure Big Butch will care to have me bringing people to see him, especially three at a time, and especially from Brooklyn. You know Big Butch has a very bad disposition, and there is no telling what he may say to me if he does not like the idea of me taking you to him."

"Everything is very kosher," Harry the Horse says. "You need not be afraid of anything whatever. We have a business proposition for Big Butch. It means a nice score for him, so you take us to him at once, or the chances are I will have to put the arm on somebody around here."

Well, as the only one around there for him to put the arm on at this time seems to be me, I can see where it will be good policy for me to take these parties to Big Butch, especially as the last of my gefillte fish is just going down Little Isadore's gullet, and Spanish John is finishing up my potatoes, and is donking a piece of rye bread in my coffee, so there is nothing more for me to eat.

So I lead them over into West Forty-ninth Street, near Tenth Avenue, where Big Butch lives on the ground floor of an old brownstone-front house, and who is sitting out on the stoop but Big Butch himself. In fact, everybody in the neighborhood is sitting out on the front stoops over there, including women and children, because sitting out on the front stoops is quite a custom in

this section of our great metropolis.

Big Butch is peeled down to his undershirt and pants, and he has no shoes on his feet, as Big Butch is a guy who likes his comfort. Furthermore, he is smoking a cigar, and laid out on the stoop beside him on a blanket is a little baby with not much clothes on. This baby seems to be asleep, and every now and then Big Butch fans it with a folded newspaper to shoo away the mosquitoes that wish to nibble on the baby. These mosquitoes come across the river from the Jersey side on hot nights and they seem to be very fond of babies.

"Hello, Butch," I say, as we stop in front of the stoop.

"Sh-h-h-h!" Butch says, pointing at the baby, and making more noise with his shush than an engine blowing off steam. Then he gets up and tiptoes down to the sidewalk where we are standing, and I am hoping that Butch feels all right, because when Butch does not feel so good he is apt to be very short with one and all. He is a guy of maybe six foot two and a couple of feet wide, and he has big hairy hands and a mean look.

In fact, Big Butch is known all over this man's town as a guy you must not monkey with in any respect, so it takes plenty of weight off of me when I see that he seems to know the parties from Brooklyn, and nods at them very friendly, especially at Harry the Horse. And right away Harry states a most surprising proposition to Big Butch.

It seems that there is a big coal company which has an office in an old building down in West Eighteenth Street, and in this office is a safe, and in this safe is the company pay roll of twenty thousand dollars cash money. Harry the Horse knows the money is there because a personal friend of his who is the paymaster for the company puts it there late this very afternoon.

It seems that the paymaster enters into a dicker with Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John for them to slug him while he is carrying the pay roll from the bank to the office in the afternoon, but something happens that they miss connections on the exact spot, so the paymaster has to carry the sugar on to the office without being slugged, and there it is now in two fat bundles.

Personally it seems to me as I listen to Harry's story that the paymaster must be a very dishonest character to be making deals to hold still while he is being slugged and the company's sugar taken away from him, but of course it is none of my business, so I take no part in the conversation.

Well, it seems that Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John wish to get the money out of the safe, but none of them knows anything about opening safes, and while they are standing around over in Brooklyn talking over what is to be done in this emergency Harry suddenly remembers that Big Butch is once in the business of opening safes for a living.

In fact, I hear afterwards that Big Butch is considered the best safe opener east of the Mississippi River in his day, but the law finally takes to sending him to Sing Sing for opening these safes, and after he is in and out of Sing Sing three different times for opening safes Butch gets sick and tired of the place, especially as they pass what is called the Baumes Law in New York, which is a law that says if a guy is sent to Sing Sing four times hand running, he must stay there the rest of his life, without any argument about it.

So Big Butch gives up opening safes for a living, and goes into business in a small way, such as running beer, and handling a little Scotch now and then, and becomes an honest citizen. Furthermore, he marries one of the neighbor's children over on the West Side by the name of Mary Murphy, and I judge the baby on this stoop comes of this marriage between Big Butch and Mary because I can see that it is a very homely baby, indeed. Still, I never see many babies that I consider rose geraniums for looks, anyway.

Well, it finally comes out that the idea of Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John is to get Big Butch to open the coal company's safe and take the pay-roll money out, and they are willing to give him fifty per cent of the money for his bother, taking fifty per cent for themselves for finding the plant, and paying all the overhead, such as the paymaster, out of their bit, which strikes me as a pretty fair sort of deal for Big Butch. But Butch only shakes his head.

"It is old-fashioned stuff," Butch says. "Nobody opens pete boxes for a living any more. They make the boxes too good, and they are all wired up with alarms and are a lot of trouble generally. I am in a legitimate business now and going along. You boys know I cannot stand another fall, what with being away three times already, and in addition to this I must mind the baby. My old lady goes to Mrs. Clancy's wake tonight up in the Bronx, and the chances are she will be there all night, as she is very fond of wakes, so I must mind little John Ignatius Junior."

"Listen, Butch," Harry the Horse says, "this is a very soft pete. It is old-fashioned, and you can open it with a toothpick. There are no wires on it, because they never put more than a dime in it before in years. It just happens they have to put the twenty G's in it tonight because my pal the paymaster makes it a point not to get back from the jug with the scratch in time to pay off today, especially after he sees we miss out on him. It is the softest touch you will ever know, and where can a guy pick up ten G's like this?"

I can see that Big Butch is thinking the ten G's over very seriously, at that, because in these times nobody can afford to pass up ten G's, especially a guy in the beer business, which is very, very tough just now. But finally he shakes his head again and says like this:

"No," he says, "I must let it go,

because I must mind the baby. My old lady is very, very particular about this, and I dast not leave little John Ignatius Junior for a minute. If Mary comes home and finds I am not minding the baby she will put the blast on me plenty. I like to turn a few honest bobs now and then as well as anybody, but," Butch says, "John Ignatius Junior comes first with me."

Then he turns away and goes back to the stoop as much as to say he is through arguing, and sits down beside John Ignatius Junior again just in time to keep a mosquito from carrying off one of John's legs. Anybody can see that Big Butch is very fond of this baby, though personally I will not give you a dime a dozen for babies, male and female.

Well, Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John are very much disappointed, and stand around talking among themselves, and paying no attention to me, when all of a sudden Spanish John, who never has much to say up to this time, seems to have a bright idea. He talks to Harry and Isadore, and they get all pleasured up over what he has to say, and finally Harry goes to Big Butch.

"Sh-h-h-h!" Big Butch says, pointing to the baby as Harry opens his mouth.

"Listen, Butch," Harry says in a whisper, "we can take the baby with us, and you can mind it and work, too."

"Why," Big Butch whispers back, "this is quite an idea indeed. Let us go into the house and talk things over."

So he picks up the baby and leads us into his joint, and gets out some pretty fair beer, though it is needled a little, at that, and we sit around the kitchen chewing the fat in whispers. There is a crib in the kitchen, and Butch puts the baby in this crib, and it keeps on snoozing away first rate while we are talking. In fact, it is sleeping so sound that I am commencing to figure that Butch must give it some of the needled beer he is feeding us, because I am feeling a little dopey myself.

Finally Butch says that as long as he can take John Ignatius Junior with him he sees no reason why he shall not go and open the safe for them, only he says he must have five per cent more to put in the baby's bank when he gets back, so as to round himself up with his ever-loving wife in case of a beef from her over keeping the baby out in the night air. Harry the Horse says he considers this extra five per cent a little strong, but Spanish John, who seems to be a very square guy, says that after all it is only fair to cut the baby in if it is to be with them when they are making the score, and Little Isadore seems to think this is all right, too. So Harry the Horse gives in, and says five per cent it is.

Well, as they do not wish to start out until after midnight, and as there is plenty of time, Big Butch gets out some more needled beer, and then he goes looking for the

tools with which he opens safes, and which he says he does not see since the day John Ignatius Junior is born and he gets them out to build the crib.

Now this is a good time for me to bid one and all farewell, and what keeps me there is something I cannot tell you to this day, because personally I never before have any idea of taking part in a safe opening, especially with a baby, as I consider such actions very dishonorable. When I come to think things over afterwards, the only thing I can figure is the needled beer, but I wish to say I am really very much surprised at myself when I find myself in a taxicab along about one o'clock in the morning with these Brooklyn parties and Big Butch and the baby.

Butch has John Ignatius Junior rolled up in a blanket, and John is still pounding his ear. Butch has a satchel of tools, and what looks to me like a big flat book, and just before we leave the house Butch hands me a package and tells me to be very careful with it. He gives Little Isadore a smaller package, which Isadore shoves into his pistol pocket, and when Isadore sits down in the taxi something goes wa-wa, like a sheep, and Big Butch becomes very indignant because it seems Isadore is sitting on John Ignatius Junior's doll, which says "Mamma" when you squeeze it.

It seems Big Butch figures that John Ignatius Junior may wish something to play with in case he wakes up, and it is a good thing for Little Isadore that the mamma doll is not squashed so it cannot say "Mamma" any more, or the chances are Little Isadore will get a good bust in the snoot.

We let the taxicab go a block away from the spot we are headed for in West Eighteenth Street, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, and walk the rest of the way two by two. I walk with Big Butch, carrying my package, and Butch is lugging the baby and his satchel and the flat thing that looks like a book. It is so quiet down in West Eighteenth Street at such an hour that you can hear yourself think, and in fact I hear myself thinking very plain that I am a big sap to be on a job like this, especially with a baby, but I keep going just the same, which shows you what a very big sap I am, indeed.

There are very few people in West Eighteenth Street when we get there, and one of them is a fat guy who is leaning against a building almost in the center of the block, and who takes a walk for himself as soon as he sees us. It seems that this fat guy is the watchman at the coal company's office and is also a personal friend of Harry the Horse, which is why he takes the walk when he sees us coming.

It is agreed before we leave Big Butch's house that Harry the Horse and Spanish John are to stay outside the place as lookouts, while Big Butch is inside opening the safe, and that Little Isadore is to go with Butch. Nothing whatever is said by

anybody about where I am to be at any time, and I can see that, no matter where I am, I will still be an outsider, but, as Butch gives me the package to carry, I figure he wishes me to remain with him.

It is no bother at all getting into the office of the coal company, which is on the ground floor, because it seems the watchman leaves the front door open, this watchman being a most obliging guy, indeed. In fact he is so obliging that by and by he comes back and lets Harry the Horse and Spanish John tie him up good and tight, and stick a handkerchief in his mouth and chuck him in an areaway next to the office, so nobody will think he has anything to do with opening the safe in case anybody comes around asking.

The office looks out on the street, and the safe that Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John wish Big Butch to open is standing up against the rear wall of the office facing the street windows. There is one little electric light burning very dim over the safe so that when anybody walks past the place outside, such as a watchman, they can look in through the window and see the safe at all times, unless they are blind. It is not a tall safe, and it is not a big safe, and I can see Big Butch grin when he sees it, so I figure this safe is not much of a safe, just as Harry the Horse claims.

Well, as soon as Big Butch and the baby and Little Isadore and me get into the office, Big Butch steps over to the safe and unfolds what I think is the big flat book, and what is it but a sort of screen painted on one side to look exactly like the front of a safe. Big Butch stands this screen up on the floor in front of the real safe, leaving plenty of space in between, the idea being that the screen will keep anyone passing in the street outside from seeing Butch while he is opening the safe, because when a man is opening a safe he needs all the privacy he can get.

Big Butch lays John Ignatius Junior down on the floor, on the blanket behind the phony safe front and takes his tools out of the satchel and starts to work opening the safe, while Little Isadore and me get back in a corner where it is dark, because there is not room for all of us back of the screen. However, we can see what Big Butch is doing, and I wish to say while I never before see a professional safe opener at work, and never wish to see another, this Butch handles himself like a real artist.

He starts drilling into the safe around the combination lock, working very fast and very quiet, when all of a sudden what happens but John Ignatius Junior sits up on the blanket and lets out a squall. Naturally this is most disquieting to me, and personally I am in favor of beaning John Ignatius Junior with something to make him keep still, because I am nervous enough as it is. But the squalling does not seem to bother Big Butch. He lays down his tools and picks up John Ig-

natius Junior and starts whispering, "There, there, there, my itty oddleums. Da-dad is here."

Well, this sounds very nonsensical to me in such a situation, and it makes no impression whatever on John Ignatius Junior. He keeps on squalling, and I judge he is squalling pretty loud because I see Harry the Horse and Spanish John both walk past the window and look in very anxious. Big Butch jiggles John Ignatius Junior up and down and keeps whispering baby talk to him, which sounds very undignified coming from a high-class safe opener, and finally Butch whispers to me to hand him the package I am carrying.

He opens the package, and what is in it but a baby's nursing bottle full of milk. Moreover, there is a little tin stew pan, and Butch hands the pan to me and whispers to me to find a water tap somewhere in the joint and fill the pan with water. So I go stumbling around in the dark in a room behind the office and bark my shins several times before I find a tap and fill the pan. I take it back to Big Butch, and he squats there with the baby on one arm, and gets a tin of what is called canned heat out of the package, and lights this canned heat with his cigar lighter, and starts heating the pan of water with the nursing bottle in it.

Big Butch keeps sticking his finger in the pan of water while it is heating, and by and by he puts the rubber nipple of the nursing bottle in his mouth and takes a pull at it to see if the milk is warm enough, just like I see dolls who have babies do. Apparently the milk is okay, as Butch hands the bottle to John Ignatius Junior, who grabs hold of it with both hands and starts sucking on the business end. Naturally he has to stop squalling, and Big Butch goes to work on the safe again, with John Ignatius Junior sitting on the blanket, pulling on the bottle and looking wiser than a treeful of owls.

It seems the safe is either a tougher job than anybody figures, or Big Butch's tools are not so good, what with being old and rusty and used for building baby cribs, because he breaks a couple of drills and works himself up into quite a sweat without getting anywhere. Butch afterwards explains to me that he is one of the first guys in this country to open safes without explosives, but he says to do this work properly you have to know the safes so as to drill to the tumblers of the lock just right, and it seems that this particular safe is a new type to him, even if it is old, and he is out of practice.

Well, in the meantime John Ignatius Junior finishes his bottle and starts mumbling again, and Big Butch gives him a tool to play with, and finally Butch needs this tool and tries to take it away from John Ignatius Junior, and the baby lets out such a squawk that Butch has to let him keep it until he can sneak it away from him, and this causes more delay.

Finally Big Butch gives up trying

to drill the safe open, and he whispers to us that he will have to put a little shot in it to loosen up the lock, which is all right with us, because we are getting tired of hanging around and listening to John Ignatius Junior's glug-glugging. As far as I am personally concerned, I am wishing I am home in bed.

Well, Butch starts pawing through his satchel looking for something and it seems that what he is looking for is a little bottle of some kind of explosive with which to shake the lock on the safe up some, and at first he cannot find this bottle, but finally he discovers that John Ignatius Junior has it and is gnawing at the cork, and Butch has quite a battle making John Ignatius Junior give it up.

Anyway, he fixes the explosive in one of the holes he drills near the combination lock on the safe, and then he puts in a fuse, and just before he touches off the fuse Butch picks up John Ignatius Junior and hands him to Little Isadore, and tells us to go into the room behind the office. John Ignatius Junior does not seem to care for Little Isadore, and I do not blame him, at that, because he starts to squirm around quite some in Isadore's arms and lets out a squall, but all of a sudden he becomes very quiet indeed, and, while I am not able to prove it, something tells me that Little Isadore has his hand over John Ignatius Junior's mouth.

Well, Big Butch joins us right away in the back room, and sound comes out of John Ignatius Junior again as Butch takes him from Little Isadore, and I am thinking that it is a good thing for Isadore that the baby cannot tell Big Butch what Isadore does to him.

"I put in just a little bit of a shot," Big Butch says, "and it will not make any more noise than snapping your fingers."

But a second later there is a big whoom from the office, and the whole joint shakes, and John Ignatius Junior laughs right out loud. The chances are he thinks it is the Fourth of July.

"I guess maybe I put in too big a charge," Big Butch says, and then he rushes into the office with Little Isadore and me after him, and John Ignatius Junior still laughing very heartily for a small baby. The door of the safe is swinging loose, and the whole joint looks somewhat wrecked, but Big Butch loses no time in getting his dukes into the safe and grabbing out two big bundles of cash money, which he sticks inside his shirt.

As we go into the street Harry the Horse and Spanish John come running up much excited, and Harry says to Big Butch like this:

"What are you trying to do," he says, "wake up the whole town?"

"Well," Butch says, "I guess maybe the charge is too strong, at that, but nobody seems to be coming, so you and Spanish John walk over to Eighth Avenue, and the rest of us will walk to Seventh, and if you go along quiet, it will be all right."

But I judge Little Isadore is tired of John Ignatius Junior's company by this time, because he says he will go with Harry the Horse and Spanish John, and this leaves Big Butch and John Ignatius Junior and me to go the other way. So we start moving, and all of a sudden two cops come tearing around the corner toward which Harry and Isadore and Spanish John are going. The chances are the cops hear the earthquake Big Butch lets off and are coming to investigate in case it is something in line with their duty.

But the chances are, too, that if Harry the Horse and the other two keep on walking along very quietly like Butch tells them to, the coppers will pass them up entirely, because it is not likely that coppers will figure anybody to be opening safes with explosives in this neighborhood. But the minute Harry the Horse sees the coppers he loses his nut, and he outs with the old equalizer and starts blasting away, and what does Spanish John do but get his out, too, and open up.

The next thing anybody knows, the two coppers are down on the ground with slugs in them, but other coppers are coming from every which direction, blowing whistles and doing a little blasting themselves, and there is plenty of excitement, especially when the coppers who are not chasing Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John start poking around the neighborhood and find Harry's pal, the watchman, all tied up nice and tight where Harry leaves him, and the watchman explains that some scoundrels blow open the safe he is watching.

All this time Big Butch and me are walking in the other direction toward Seventh Avenue, and Big Butch has John Ignatius in his arms, and John Ignatius is now squalling very loud, indeed. The chances are he is still thinking of the big whoom back there which tickles him so and is wishing to hear some more whooms. Anyway, he is beating his own best record for squalling, and as we go walking along Big Butch says to me like this:

"I dast not run," he says, "because if any coppers see me running they will start popping at me and maybe hit John Ignatius Junior, and besides running will joggle the milk up in him and make him sick. My old lady always warns me never to joggle John Ignatius Junior when he is full of milk."

"Well, Butch," I say, "there is no milk in me, and I do not care if I am joggled up, so if you do not mind, I will start doing a piece of running at the next corner."

But just then around the corner of Seventh Avenue toward which we are headed comes two or three coppers with a big fat sergeant with them, and one of the coppers, who is half out of breath as if he has been doing plenty of sprinting, is explaining to the sergeant that somebody blows a safe down the street and shoots a couple of coppers in the getaway.

And there is Big Butch, with John Ignatius Junior in his arms

and Twenty G's in his shirt front and a tough record behind him, walking right up to them.

I am feeling very sorry, indeed, for Big Butch, and very sorry for myself, too, and I am saying to myself that if I get out of this I will never associate with anyone but ministers of the gospel as long as I live. I can remember thinking that I am getting a better break than Butch, at that, because I will not have to go to Sing Sing for the rest of my life, like him, and I also remember wondering what they will give John Ignatius Junior, who is still tearing off these squalls, with Big Butch saying, "There, there, there, Daddy's itty woogleums." Then I hear one of the coppers say to the fat sergeant:

"We better nail these guys. They may be in on this."

Well, I can see it is good-by to Butch and John Ignatius Junior and me, as the fat sergeant steps up to Big Butch, but instead of putting the arm on Butch, the fat sergeant only points at John Ignatius Junior and asks very sympathetic:

"Teeth?"

"No," Big Butch says. "Not teeth. Colic. I just get the doctor here out of bed to do something for him, and we are going to a drug store to get some medicine."

Well, naturally I am very much surprised at this statement, because of course I am not a doctor, and if John Ignatius Junior has colic it serves him right, but I am only hoping they do not ask for my degree, when the fat sergeant says:

"Too bad. I know what it is. I got three of them at home. But," he says, "it acts more like it is teeth than colic."

Then as Big Butch and John Ignatius Junior and me go on about our business I hear the fat sergeant say to the copper, very sarcastic:

"Yea, of course a guy is out blowing safes with a baby in his arms! You will make a great detective, you will!"

I do not see Big Butch for several days after I learn that Harry the Horse and Little Isadore and Spanish John get back to Brooklyn all right, except they are a little nicked up here and there from the slugs the coppers toss at them, while the coppers they clip are not damaged so very much. Furthermore, the chances are I will not see Big Butch for several years, if it is left to me, but he comes looking for me one night, and he seems to be all pleasured up about something.

"Say," Big Butch says to me, "you know I never give a copper credit for knowing any too much about anything, but I wish to say that this fat sergeant we run into the other night is a very, very smart duck. He is right about it being teeth that is ailing John Ignatius Junior, for what happens yesterday but John cuts in his first tooth."

miracle of the fifteen murderers

by . . . . . Ben Hecht

They were a congress of killers, but no jury, interested solely in justice, would find them guilty.

THERE IS ALWAYS an aura of mystery to the conclaves of medical men. One may wonder whether the secrecy with which the fraternity surrounds its gatherings is designed to keep the layman from discovering how much it knows or how much it doesn't know. Either knowledge would be unnerving to that immemorial guinea pig who submits himself to the abracadabras of chemicals, scalpels and incantations under the delusion he is being cured rather than explored.

Among the most mysterious of medical get-togethers in this generation have been those held in New York City by a group of eminent doctors calling themselves the X Club. Every three months this little band of healers have hied them to the Walton Hotel overlooking the East River and, behind locked doors and beyond the eye of even medical journalism, engaged themselves in unknown emprise lasting till dawn.

What the devil had been going on in these conclaves for twenty years no one knew, not even the ubiquitous head of the American Medical Association, nor yet any of the colleagues, wives, friends or dependents of the X Club's mem-

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Almost thirty years ago a macabre mystery novel, The Florentine Dagger, *won much deserved acclaim for a young Chicago newspaperman. Since that time Mr. Hecht has been, either successively or simultaneously, novelist, short-story writer, Broadway playwright, Hollywood scripter, magazine journalist and independent film producer—all of them with resounding success. In the course of this exuberant career, Mr. Hecht has often returned to his early love—the mystery story. Which is a blessing for all addicts, who recall with fondness his magnificent motion picture,* Crime without Passion*—and who will find in this story that the master has lost none of his famous cunning.*

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bers. The talent for secrecy is highly developed among doctors who, even with nothing to conceal, are often as close-mouthed as old-fashioned bomb throwers on their way to a rendezvous.

How then do I know the story of these long-guarded sessions? The answer is—the war. The war has put an end to them, as it has to nearly all mysteries other than its own. The world, engaged in re-examining its manners and its soul, has closed the door on minor adventure. Nine of the fifteen medical sages who comprised the X Club are in uniform and preside over combat zone hospitals. Deficiencies of age and health have kept the others at home—with increased labors. There is a part of science which retains a reluctant interest in the misfortunes of civilians and has not yet removed its eye entirely from the banal battlefields on which they ignominiously keep perishing.

"Considering that we have disbanded," Dr. Alex Hume said to me at dinner one evening, "and that it is unlikely we shall ever assemble again, I see no reason for preserving our secret. Yours is a childish and romantic mind, and may be revolted by the story I tell you. You will undoubtedly translate the whole thing into some sort of diabolical tale and miss the deep human and scientific import of the X Club. But I am not the one to reform the art of fiction, which must substitute sentimentality for truth, and Cinderella for Galileo."

And so on. I will skip the rest of my friend's all-knowing prelude. You may have read Dr. Hume's various books, dealing with the horseplay of the subconscious. If you have, you know this bald-headed mastermind well enough. If not, take my word for it he is a genius. There is nobody I know more adept at prancing around in the solar plexus swamps out of which most of the world's incompetence and confusion appear to rise. He has, too, if there is any doubt about his great talent, the sneer and chuckle which are the war whoop of the superpsychologist. His face is round and his mouth is pursed in a chronic grimace of disbelief and contradiction. You can't help such an expression once you have discovered what a scurvy and detestable morass is the soul of man. Like most subterranean workers, my friend is almost as blind as a bat behind his heavy glasses. And like many leading psychiatrists, he favors the short and balloonlike physique of Napoleon.

The last dramatic meeting of the X Club was held on a rainy March night. Despite the hostile weather, all fifteen of its members attended, for there was an added lure to this gathering. A new member was to be inducted into the society.

Dr. Hume was assigned to prepare the neophyte for his debut. And it was in the wake of the round-faced soul fixer that Dr. Samuel Warner entered the sanctum of the X Club.

Dr. Warner was unusually young for a medical genius—that is, a recognized one. And he had never re-

ceived a fuller recognition of his wizardry with saw, ax and punch hole than his election as a member of the X Club. For the fourteen older men who had invited him to be one of them were leaders in their various fields. They were the medical peerage. This does not mean necessarily that any layman had ever heard of them. Eminence in the medical profession is as showy at best as a sprig of edelweiss on a mountaintop. The war, which offers its magic billboards for the vanities of small souls and transmutes the hunger for publicity into sacrificial and patriotic ardors, has not yet disturbed the anonymity of the great medicos. They have moved their bushels to the front lines and are busy under them, spreading their learning among the wounded.

The new member was a tense and good-looking man with the fever of hard work glowing in his steady dark eyes. His wide mouth smiled quickly and abstractedly, as is often the case with surgeons who train their reactions not to interfere with their concentration.

Having exchanged greetings with the eminent club members, who included half of his living medical heroes, Dr. Warner seated himself in a corner and quietly refused a highball, a cocktail, and a slug of brandy. His face remained tense, his athletic body straight in its chair as if it were poised for a sprint rather than a meeting.

At nine o'clock Dr. William Tick ordered an end to all the guzzling and declared the fifty-third meeting of the X Club in session. The venerable diagnostician placed himself behind a table at the end of the ornate hotel room and glared at the group ranged in front of him.

Dr. Tick had divided his seventy-five years equally between practicing the art of medicine and doing his best to stamp it out—such, at least, was the impression of the thousands of students who had been submitted to his irascible guidance. As Professor of Internal Medicine at a great Eastern medical school, Dr. Tick had favored the Education by Insult theory of pedagogy. There were eminent doctors who still winced when they recalled some of old bilious-eyed, arthritic, stooped Tick's appraisals of their budding talents, and who still shuddered at the memory of his medical philosophy.

"Medicine," Dr. Tick had confided to flock after flock of students, "is a noble dream and at the same time the most ancient expression of error and idiocy known to man. Solving the mysteries of heaven has not given birth to as many abortive findings as has the quest into the mysteries of the human body. When you think of yourselves as scientists, I want you always to remember everything you learn from me will probably be regarded tomorrow as the naïve confusions of a pack of medical aborigines. Despite all our toil and progress, the art of medicine still falls somewhere between trout casting and spook writing.

"There are two handicaps to the

practice of medicine," Tick had repeated tenaciously through forty years of teaching. "The first is the eternal charlatanism of the patient who is full of fake diseases and phantom agonies. The second is the basic incompetence of the human mind, medical or otherwise, to observe without prejudice, acquire information without becoming too smug to use it intelligently, and most of all, to apply its wisdom without vanity."

From behind his table old Tick's eyes glared at the present group of "incompetents" until a full classroom silence had arrived, and then turned to the tense, good-looking face of Dr. Warner.

"We have a new medical genius with us tonight," he began, "one I well remember in his prewizard days. A hyperthyroid with kidney disfunction indicated. But not without a trace of talent. For your benefit, Sam, I will state the meaning and purpose of our organization."

"I have already done that," said Dr. Hume, "rather thoroughly."

"Dr. Hume's explanations to you," Tick continued coldly, "if they are of a kind with his printed works, have most certainly left you dazed it not dazzled."

"I understood him quite well," Warner said.

"Nonsense," old Tick said. "You always had a soft spot for psychiatry and I always warned you against it. Psychiatry is a plot against medicine. And who knows but it may some day overthrow us? In the meantime it behooves us not to consort too freely with our enemies."

You may be sure that Dr. Hume smiled archly at this.

"You will allow me," Tick went on, "to clarify whatever the learned Hume has been trying to tell you."

"Well, if you want to waste time." The new member smiled nervously and mopped his neck with a handkerchief.

Dr. Frank Rosson, the portly and distinguished gynecologist, chuckled. "Tick's going good tonight," he whispered to Hume.

"Senility inflamed by sadism," said Hume.

"Dr. Warner," the pedagogue continued, "the members of the X Club have a single and interesting purpose in their meeting. They come together every three months to confess to some murder any of them may have committed since our last assembly. I am referring, of course, to medical murder. Although it would be a relief to hear any one of us confess to a murder performed out of passion rather than stupidity. Indeed, Dr. Warner, if you have killed a wife or polished off an uncle recently, and would care to unbosom yourself, we will listen respectfully. It is understood that nothing you say will be brought to the attention of the police or the A. M. A."

Old Tick's eyes paused to study the growing tension in the new member's face.

"I am sure you have not slain any of your relatives," he sighed, "or that you will ever do so except in the line of duty.

"The learned Hume," he went on, "has undoubtedly explained these forums to you on the psychiatric basis that confession is good for the soul. This is nonsense. We are not here to ease our souls but to improve them. Our real purpose is scientific. Since we dare not admit our mistakes to the public and since we are too great and learned to be criticized by the untutored laity and since such inhuman perfection as that to which we pretend is not good for our weak and human natures, we have formed this society. It is the only medical organization in the world where the members boast only of their mistakes.

"And now," Tick beamed on the neophyte, "allow me to define what we consider a real, fine professional murder. It is the killing of a human being who has trustingly placed himself in a doctor's hands. Mind you, the death of a patient does not in itself spell murder. We are concerned only with those cases in which the doctor, by a wrong diagnosis or by demonstrably wrong medication or operative procedure, has killed off a patient who, without the aforesaid doctor's attention, would have continued to live and prosper."

"Hume explained all this to me," the new member muttered impatiently, and then raised his voice: "I appreciate that this is my first meeting and that I might learn more from my distinguished colleagues by listening than by talking. But I have something rather important to say."

"A murder?" Tick asked eagerly.

"Yes," said the new member.

The old professor nodded. "Very good, he said. "And we shall be glad to listen to you. But we have several murderers on the docket ahead of you."

The new member was silent and remained sitting bolt upright in his chair. It was at this point that several, including Hume, noticed there was something more than stage fright in the young surgeon's tension. The certainty filled the room that Sam Warner had come to his first meeting of the X Club with something violent and mysterious boiling in him.

Dr. Philip Kurtiff, the eminent neurologist, put his hand on Warner's arm and said quietly, "There's no reason to feel bad about anything you're going to tell us. We're all pretty good medical men and we've all done worse—whatever it is."

"If you please," old Tick demanded, "we will have silence. This is not a sanatorium for doctors with guilt complexes. It is a clinic for error. And we will continue to conduct it in an orderly, scientific fashion. If you want to hold Sam Warner's hand, Kurtiff, that's your privilege. But do it in silence."

He beamed suddenly at the new member.

"I confess," he went on, "that I'm as curious as anybody to hear how so great a know-it-all as our young friend Dr. Warner could have killed off one of his customers. But our curiosity will have to wait. Since five of you were absent from

our last gathering I think that the confession of Dr. James Sweeney should be repeated for your benefit."

Dr. Sweeney stood up and turned his lugubrious face and shining eyes to the five absentees. Of all present, Sweeney was considered next to old Tick the ablest diagnostician in the East.

"Well," he said in his preoccupied monotone, "I told it once, but I'll tell it again. I sent a patient to my X-ray room to have a fluoroscopy done. My assistant gave him a barium meal to drink and put him under the fluoroscope. I walked in a half-hour later to observe progress and when I saw the patient under the fluoroscopic screen I observed to my assistant, Dr. Kroch, that it was amazing and that I had never seen anything like it. Kroch was too overcome to bear me out.

"What I saw was that the patient's entire stomach and lower esophagus were motionless and dilated, apparently made out of stone. And as I studied this phenomenon, I noticed it was becoming clearer and sharper. The most disturbing factor in the situation was that we both knew there was nothing to be done. Dr. Kroch, in fact, showed definite signs of hysteria. Shortly afterward the patient became moribund and fell to the floor."

"Well, I'll be damned!" several of those who had been absent cried in unison, Dr. Kurtiff adding, "What was it?"

"It was simple," said Sweeney. "The bottom of the glass out of which the patient had drunk his barium meal was caked solid. We had filled him up with plaster of Paris. I fancy the pressure caused a fatal coronary attack."

"Good Lord," the new member said. "How did it get into the glass?"

"Through some pharmaceutical error," said Sweeney mildly.

"What, if anything, was the matter with the patient before he adventured into your office?" Dr. Kurtiff inquired.

"The autopsy revealed chiefly a solidified stomach and esophagus," said Sweeney. "But I think from several indications that there may have been a little tendency to pyloric spasm, which caused the belching for which he was referred to me."

"A rather literary murder," said old Tick. "A sort of Pygmalion in reverse."

The old professor paused and fastened his red-rimmed eyes on Warner. "By the way, before we proceed," he said, "I think it is time to tell you the full name of our club. Our full name is the X Marks the Spot Club. We prefer, of course, to use the abbreviated title as being a bit more social sounding."

"Of course," said the new member, whose face now appeared to be getting redder.

"And now," announced old Tick, consulting a scribbled piece of paper, "our first case on tonight's docket will be Dr. Wendell Davis."

There was silence as the elegant stomach specialist stood up. Davis

was a doctor who took his manner as seriously as his medicine. Tall, solidly built, gray-haired and beautifully barbered, his face was without expression—a large, pink mask that no patient, however ill and agonized, had ever seen disturbed.

"I was called late last summer to the home of a workingman," he began. "Senator Bell had given a picnic for some of his poorer constituency. As a result of this event, the three children of a steamfitter named Horowitz were brought down with food poisoning. They had overeaten at the picnic. The senator, as host, felt responsible, and I went to the Horowitz home at his earnest solicitation. I found two of the children very sick and vomiting considerably. They were nine and eleven. The mother gave me a list of the various foods all three of them had eaten. It was staggering. I gave them a good dose of castor oil.

"The third child, aged seven, was not as ill as the other two. He looked pale, had a slight fever, felt some nausea—but was not vomiting. It seemed obvious that he too was poisoned to a lesser degree. Accordingly I prescribed an equal dose of castor oil for the youngest child —just to be on the safe side.

"I was called by the father in the middle of the night. He was alarmed over the condition of the seven-year-old. He reported that the other two children were much improved. I told him not to worry, that the youngest had been a little late in developing food poisoning but would unquestionably be better in the morning, and that his cure was as certain as his sister's and brother's.

"When I hung up I felt quite pleased with myself for having anticipated the youngest one's condition and prescribed the castor oil prophylactically. I arrived at the Horowitz home at noon the next day and found the two older children practically recovered. The seven-year-old, however, appeared to be very sick indeed. They had been trying to reach me since breakfast. The child had 105 degrees temperature. It was dehydrated, the eyes sunken and circled, the expression pinched, the nostrils dilated, the lips cyanotic and the skin cold and clammy."

Dr. Davis paused. Dr. Milton Morris, the renowned lung specialist, spoke. "It died within a few hours?" he asked.

Dr. Davis nodded.

"Well," Dr. Morris said quietly, "it seems pretty obvious. The child was suffering from acute appendicitis when you first saw it. The castor oil ruptured its appendix. By the time you got around to looking at it again, peritonitis had set in."

"Yes," said Dr. Davis slowly. "That's exactly what happened."

"Murder by castor oil," old Tick cackled, "plus an indifference to the poor."

"Not at all," Dr. Davis said. "All three children had been at the picnic, overeaten alike and revealed the same symptoms."

"Not quite the same," Dr. Hume said.

"Oh, you would have psychoanalyzed the third child?" Dr. Davis smiled.

"No," said Hume. "I would have examined its abdomen like any penny doctor, considering that it had some pain and nausea, and found it rigid with both direct and rebound tenderness."

"Yes, it would have been an easy diagnosis for a medical student," Dr. Kurtiff agreed. "But unfortunately, we have outgrown the humility of medical students."

"Dr. Davis' murder is morally instructive," old Tick announced, "but I find it extremely dull. I have a memo from Dr. Kenneth Wood. Dr. Wood has the floor."

The noted Scotch Surgeon, famed in his college days as an Olympic Games athlete, stood up. He was still a man of prowess, large-handed, heavy-shouldered and with the purr of masculine strength in his soft voice.

"I don't know what kind of murder you can call this." Dr. Wood smiled at his colleagues.

"Murder by butchery is the usual tickle," Tick said.

"No, I doubt that," Dr. Morris protested. "Ken's too skillful to cut off anybody's leg by mistake."

"I guess you'll have to call it just plain murder by stupidity," Dr. Wood said softly.

Old Tick cackled. "If you'd paid a little more attention to diagnosis than to shot-putting you wouldn't be killing off such hordes of patients," he said.

"This is my first report in three years," Wood answered modestly. "And I've been operating at the rate of four or five daily, including holidays."

"My dear Kenneth," Dr. Hume said, "every surgeon is entitled to one murder in three years. A phenomenal record, in fact—when you consider the temptations."

"Proceed with the crime," Tick said.

"Well," the strong-looking surgeon turned to his hospital colleague, the new member, "you know how it is with these acute gall bladders, Sam."

Warner nodded abstractedly.

Dr. Wood went on: "Brought in late at night. In extreme pain. I examined her. Found the pain in the right upper quadrant of the abdomen. It radiated to the back and right shoulder. Completely characteristic of gall bladder. I gave her opiates. They had no effect on her, which, as you know, backs up any gall bladder diagnosis. Opiates never touch the gall bladder."

"We know that," said the new member nervously.

"Excuse me," Dr. Wood smiled. "I want to get all the points down carefully. Well, I gave her some nitroglycerine to lessen the pain then. Her temperature was 101. By morning the pain was so severe that it seemed certain the gall bladder had perforated. I operated. There was nothing wrong with her gall bladder. She died an hour later."

"What did the autopsy show?" Dr. Sweeney asked.

"Wait a minute," Wood an-

swered. "You're supposed to figure it out, aren't you? Come on—you tell me what was the matter with her."

"Did you take her history?" Dr. Kurtiff asked after a pause.

"No," Wood answered.

"Aha!" Tick snorted. "There you have it! Blind man's buff again."

"It was an emergency." Wood looked flushed. "And it seemed an obvious case. I've had hundreds of them."

"The facts seem to be as follows," Tick spoke up. "Dr. Wood murdered a woman because he misunderstood the source of a pain. We have, then, a very simple problem. What besides the gall bladder can produce the sort of pain that that eminent surgeon has described?"

"Heart," Dr. Morris answered quickly.

"You're getting warm," said Wood.

"Before operating on anyone with so acute a pain, and in the absence of any medical history," Tick went on, "I would most certainly have looked at the heart."

"Well, you'd have done right," said Wood quietly. "The autopsy showed an infraction of the descending branch of the right coronary artery."

"Which a cardiogram would have told you," said old Tick. "But you didn't have to go near a cardiograph. All you had to do is ask one question. If you had even called up a neighbor of the patient she would have told you that previous attacks of pain came on exertion—which would have spelled heart, and not gall bladder.

"Murder by a sophomore," old Tick pronounced wrathfully.

"The first and last," said Wood quietly. "There won't be any more heart-case mistakes in my hospital."

"Good, good," old Tick said. "And now, gentlemen, the crimes reported thus far have been too infantile for discussion. We have learned nothing from them other than that science and stupidity go hand in hand, a fact already too well known to us. However, we have with us tonight a young but extremely talented wielder of the medical saws. He has been sitting here for the last hour, fidgeting like a true criminal, sweating with guilt and a desire to tell all. Gentlemen, I give you our new and youngest culprit, Dr. Samuel Warner."

Dr. Warner faced his fourteen eminent colleagues with a sudden excitement in his manner. His eyes glittered and the dusty look of hard work and near exhaustion already beginning to mark his youth, lifted from his face.

The older men regarded him quietly and with various degrees of irritation. They knew, without further corroboration than his manner, that this medico was full of untenable theories and half-baked medical discoveries. They had been full of such things themselves once. And they settled back to enjoy themselves. There is nothing as pleasing to a graying medical man as the opportunity of slapping a dunce cap on

the young of science. Old Tick, surveying his colleagues, grinned. They had all acquired the look of pedagogues holding a switch behind their backs.

Dr. Warner mopped his neck with his wet handkerchief and smiled knowingly at the medical peerage.

"I'll give you this case in some detail," he said, "because I think it contains as interesting a problem as you can find in practice."

Dr. Rosson, the gynecologist, grunted, but said nothing.

"The patient was a young man, or rather a boy," Warner went on eagerly. "He was seventeen, and amazingly talented. He wrote poetry. That's how I happened to meet him. I read one of his poems in a magazine, and it was so impressive I wrote him a letter."

"Rhymed poetry?" Dr. Wood asked, with a wink at old Tick.

"Yes," said Warner. "I read all his manuscripts. They were sort of revolutionary. His poetry was a cry against injustice. Every kind of injustice. Bitter and burning."

"Wait a minute," Dr. Rosson said. "The new member seems to have some misconception of our function. We are not a literary society, Warner."

"And before you get started," Dr. Hume grinned, "no bragging. You can do your bragging at the annual surgeons' convention."

"Gentlemen," Warner said, "I have no intention of bragging. I'll stick to murder, I assure you. And as bad a one as you've ever heard."

"Good," Dr. Kurtiff said. "Go on. And take it easy and don't break down."

"Yes." Dr. Wood grinned. "I remember when Morris here made his first confession. We had to pour a quart of whisky into him before he quit blubbering."

"I won't break down," Warner said. "Don't worry. Well, the patient was sick for two weeks before I was called."

"I thought you were his friend," Dr. Davis said.

"I was," Warner answered. "But he didn't believe in doctors."

"No faith in them, eh?" old Tick cackled. "Brilliant boy."

"He was," said Warner eagerly. "I felt upset when I came and saw how sick he was. I had him moved to a hospital at once."

"Oh, a rich poet," Dr. Sweeney said.

"No," said Warner. "I paid his expenses. And I spent all the time I could with him. The sickness had started with a severe pain on the left side of the abdomen. He was going to call me, but the pain subsided after three days, so the patient thought he was well. But it came back in two days and he began running a temperature. He developed diarrhea. There was pus and blood, but no amoeba or pathogenic bacteria when he finally sent for me.

"After the pathology reports I made a diagnosis of ulcerative colitis. The pain being on the left side ruled out the appendix. I put the patient on sulfaguanidin and unconcentrated liver extract, and gave him a high protein diet—chiefly

milk. Despite this treatment and constant observation the patient got worse. He developed generalized abdominal tenderness, both direct and rebound, and rigidity of the entire left rectus muscle. After two weeks of careful treatment the patient died."

"And the autopsy showed you'd been wrong?" Dr. Wood asked.

"I didn't make an autopsy," said Warner. "The boy's parents had perfect faith in me. As did the boy. They both believed I was doing everything possible to save his life."

"Then how do you know you were wrong in your diagnosis?" Dr. Hume asked.

"By the simple fact," said Warner irritably, "that the patient died instead of being cured. When he died I knew I had killed him by a faulty diagnosis."

"A logical conclusion," said Dr. Sweeney. "Pointless medication is no alibi."

"Well, gentlemen," old Tick cackled from behind his table, "our talented new member has obviously polished off a great poet and close personal friend. Indictments of his diagnosis are now in order."

But no one spoke. Doctors have a sense for things unseen and complications unstated. And nearly all the fourteen looking at Warner felt there was something hidden. The surgeon's tension, his elation and its overtone of mockery, convinced them there was something untold in the story of the dead poet. They approached the problem cautiously.

"How long ago did the patient die?" Dr. Rosson asked.

"Last Wednesday," said Warner. "Why?"

"What hospital?" asked Davis.

"St. Michael's," said Warner.

"You say the parents had faith in you," said Kurtiff, "and still have. Yet you seem curiously worried about something. Has there been any inquiry by the police?"

"No," said Warner. "I committed the perfect crime. The police haven't even heard of it. And even my victim died full of gratitude." He beamed at the room. "Listen," he went on, "even you people may not be able to disprove my diagnosis."

This brash challenge irritated a number of the members.

"I don't think it will be very difficult to knock out your diagnosis," said Dr. Morris.

"There's a catch to it," said Wood slowly, his eyes boring at Warner.

"The only catch there is," said Warner quickly, "is the complexity of the case. You gentlemen evidently prefer the simpler malpractice type of crime, such as I've listened to tonight."

There was a pause, and then Dr. Davis inquired in a soothing voice, "You described an acute onset of pain before the diarrhea, didn't you?"

"That's right," said Warner.

"Well," Davis continued coolly, "the temporary relief of symptoms and their recurrence within a few days sounds superficially like ulcers

—excepting for one single point."

"I disagree," Dr. Sweeney said softly. "Dr. Warner's diagnosis is a piece of blundering stupidity. The symptoms he has presented have nothing to do with ulcerative colitis."

Warner flushed and his jaw muscles moved angrily. "Would you mind backing up your insults with a bit of science?" he said.

"Very easily done," Sweeney answered calmly. "The late onset of diarrhea and fever you describe rule out ulcerative colitis in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. What do you think, Dr. Tick?"

"No ulcers," said Tick, his eyes studying Warner.

"You mentioned a general tenderness of the abdomen as one of the last symptoms," said Dr. Davis smoothly.

"That's right," said Warner.

"Well, if you have described the case accurately," Davis continued, "there is one obvious fact revealed. The general tenderness points to a peritonitis. I'm certain an autopsy would show that this perforation had walled off and spilled over and that a piece of intestine was telescoped into another."

"I don't think so," Dr. William Zinner, the cancer research man, said. He was short, bird-faced and barely audible. Silence fell on the room, and the others waited attentively for his soft voice.

"It couldn't be an intussusception such as Dr. Davis describes," he went on. "The patient was only seventeen. Intussusception is unusual at that age unless the patient has a tumor of the intestines. In which case he would not have stayed alive that long."

"Excellent," old Tick spoke.

"I thought of intussusception," said Warner, "and discarded it for that very reason."

"How about a twisted gut?" Dr. Wood asked. "That could produce the symptoms described."

"No," said Dr. Rosson. "A volvulus means gangrene and death in three days. Warner says he attended his patient for two weeks and that the boy was sick for two weeks before Warner was called. The length of the illness rules out intussusception, volvulus and intestinal tumor."

"There's one other thing," Dr. Morris said. "A left-sided appendix."

"That's out, too," Dr. Wood said quickly. "The first symptom of a left-sided appendix would not be the acute pain described by Warner."

"The only thing we have determined," said Dr. Sweeney, "is a perforation other than ulcer. Why not go on with that?"

"Yes," said Dr. Morris. "Ulcerative colitis is out of the question considering the course taken by the disease. I'm sure we're dealing with another type of perforation."

"The next question," announced old Tick, "is what made the perforation?"

Dr. Warner mopped his face with his wet handkerchief and said softly, "I never thought of an object perforation."

"You should have," Dr. Kurtiff stated.

"Come, come," old Tick interrupted. "Let's not wander. What caused the perforation?"

"He was seventeen," Kurtiff answered, "and too old to be swallowing pins."

"Unless," said Dr. Hume, "he had a taste for pins. Did the patient want to live, Warner?"

"He wanted to live," said Warner grimly, "more than anybody I ever knew."

"I think we can ignore the suicide theory," said Dr. Kurtiff. "I am certain we are dealing with a perforation of the intestines and not of the subconscious."

"Well," Dr. Wood spoke, "it couldn't have been a chicken bone. A chicken bone would have stuck in the esophagus and never got through to the stomach."

"There you are, Warner," old Tick said. "We've narrowed it down. The spreading tenderness you described means a spreading infection. The course taken by the disease means a perforation other than ulcerous. And a perforation of that type means an object swallowed. We have ruled out pins and chicken bones. Which leaves us with only one other normal guess."

"A fishbone," said Dr. Sweeney.

"Exactly," said Tick.

Warner stood listening tensely to the voices affirming the diagnosis. Tick delivered the verdict.

"I think we are all agreed," he said, "that Sam Warner killed his patient by treating him for ulcerative colitis when an operation removing an abscessed fishbone would have saved his life."

Warner moved quickly across the room to the closet where he had hung his hat and coat.

"Where are you going?" Dr. Wood called after him. "We've just started the meeting."

Warner was putting on his coat and grinning.

"I haven't got much time," he said, "but I want to thank all of you for your diagnosis. You were right about there being a catch to the case. The catch is that my patient is still alive. I've been treating him for ulcerative colitis for two weeks and I realized this afternoon that I had wrongly diagnosed the case—and that he would be dead in twenty-four hours unless I could find out what really was the matter with him."

Warner was in the doorway, his eyes glittering.

"Thanks again, gentlemen, for the consultation and your diagnosis," he said. "It will enable me to save my patient's life." . . .

A half-hour later, the members of the X Club stood grouped in one of the operating rooms of St. Michael's Hospital. They looked different from the men who had been playing a medical Halloween in the Walton Hotel. There is a change that comes over doctors when they face disease. The oldest and the weariest of them draw vigor from a crisis. The shamble leaves them and it is the straight back of the

champion that enters the operating room. Confronting the problem of life and death, the tired, red-rimmed eyes become full of greatness and even beauty.

On the operating table lay the unconscious body of a Negro boy. Dr. Warner in his surgical whites stood over him.

The fourteen other X Club members watched Warner operate. Wood nodded approvingly at his speed. Rosson cleared his throat to say something, but the swift-moving hands of the surgeon held him silent. No one spoke. The minutes passed. The nurses quietly handed instruments to the surgeon. Blood spattered their hands and reddened the fronts of their white aprons.

Fourteen great medical men stared hopefully at the pinched and unconscious face of a colored boy who had swallowed a fishbone. No king or pope ever lay ill with more medical genius holding its breath around him.

Suddenly the perspiring surgeon raised something aloft in his forceps.

"Wash this off," he muttered to the nurse, "and show it to these gentlemen."

He busied himself placing drains in the abscessed cavity and then powdered some sulfanilamide into the opened abdomen to kill the infection.

Old Tick stepped forward and took the object from the nurse's hand.

"A fishbone," he said.

The X Club gathered around it as if it were a treasure indescribable.

"The removal of this small object," old Tick cackled softly, "will enable the patient to continue writing poetry denouncing the greeds and horrors of our world."

That, in effect, was the story Hume told me, plus the epilogue of the Negro poet's recovery three weeks later. We had long finished dinner and it was late night when we stepped into the war-dimmed streets of New York. The headlines on the newsstands had changed in size only. They were larger in honor of the larger slaughters they heralded.

Looking at them you could see the death-strewn wastes of battles. But another picture came to my mind—a picture that had in it the hope of a better world. It was the hospital room in which *fifteen* famed and learned heroes stood battling for the life of a Negro boy who had swallowed a fishbone.

In our next issue you will meet THE REFUGEES by T. S. Stribling, as odd and deadly a group as ever lived—or died—in the sunny little city of Curacao, Dutch West Indies. They include an ex-dictator, an innkeeper and his lovely daughter, a terrified Latin and a pair of murders that tie the police in knots. It requires the wise and ingenious psychology of Professor Poggioli to unravel their crimes.

killer's date-line

by . . . . . Nelson S. Bond

Americans and Englishmen may use the same language. But certain small differences do spell death.

UP TILL THE VERY last moment Rungate hoped he might not have to take the final irrevocable step for which he had come prepared. But when Sir Geoffrey stopped flicking the sheets of the ledger, when his shrewd suddenly comprehending eyes swiveled from the precise false column of figures to seek those of his American representative, Rungate moved to stifle their unspoken query.

In the quiet hotel room the pistol shot echoed alarmingly. Brief panic gripped Rungate. His gaze, leaping from window to door to window again, did not witness the last convulsive crumpling of his victim. When reason reminded him that the report could be, to unheeding ears, no more sinister than the snort of any backfiring motor, he turned to find his late employer slumped over the desk.

So swiftly had Sir Geoffrey died that he looked much like a man suddenly overtaken by slumber. Except for his eyes, which were wide open, and for the unpleasantness sluggishly staining the blotter beneath his head.

Rungate, who had feared discovery ever since learning of his employer's decision to visit the New York offices, had laid careful plans for that which might be necessary. Now he sprang to the accomplishment of those plans.

As he slipped from desk to chair to doorway, erasing with his pocket handkerchief the few fingerprints which might betray his presence, he commended himself on having so cleverly concealed his visit. He had entered the hotel suite unnoticed—through the street door to the grill, thence into the lounge like any casual guest. Up a seldom-used flight of stairs to the third floor, lingering briefly in the stairwell to make sure no inquisitive eyes saw him cross the corridor to Sir Geoffrey's room.

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Caution would allow him to exit the same way. First he must remove all evidence of his visit, though.

The pistol—an old .38 of British manufacture which could not be traced to Rungate and might easily have been Sir Geoffrey's own—he wiped carefully clean. He then pressed it many times against his victim's unresisting fingers. A single, sharp impression about the grip was a fool's error. Rungate smudged it with a host of tiny smears, then placed it near Sir Geoffrey's hand.

The tableau looked satisfactorily like suicide. But there was one more possibility to be considered. The old man might somewhere have made a notation.

He had. On the desk sat a calendar-and-memorandum pad. Under that day's date, November 11, were noted in Sir Geoffrey's bold rolling script the three engagements made by the old man since his noon docking—

Taylor, 4 p.m., tom.
Rungate, 7 p.m., 11/11
Brit. Cons., Wed. 9 a.m.

For an instant Rungate's heart stopped. Despite his elaborate precautions, here was a witness whose mute accusation he could not deny! Impossible to destroy the incriminating page and legend. Equally impossible to deny the appointment.

Then he saw the perfect solution. With the same pen used by the dead man he made one small change in the scribbled date. The memo now read, "Rungate, 7 p.m., 11/14." There was no semblance of forgery. The altered 4 identically matched that in the line above it. His alibi was now perfect. One final glance about him and Rungate slipped quietly from the room.

The expected call came at ten the next morning. His caller was Framleigh, an attaché at the consulate. The young Britisher's voice was high-pitched with excitement.

"Rungate? I say, old man—Sir Geoffrey . . ."

"Landed yesterday," said Rungate. "He's at the Hotel—"

"I know—but there's a whacking mess. He's dead!"

"Dead!" Rungate's tone was a marvel of mingled horror and concern. "Impossible! Why, when I talked to him yesterday on the 'phone he was feeling fine! What . . . ?"

"I can't imagine. But the police just called, and I thought you'd want to go over with me."

"I'll meet you right away," said Rungate.

Detective Conway of the Homicide Squad awaited them in the hotel room. He was a brown man with tired eyes. The room was not as Rungate had left it. Fingerprint experts had left their powdery spoor about. Sir Geoffrey still sprawled across the desk, but there was a ghastly difference in his posture. His hands were clawed, his body starkly rigid, his complexion waxlike.

Framleigh gasped, "Why—why, he's *shot* himself! You didn't say."

Conway nodded disinterestedly. "It's him? We need an identification."

"Oh, yes. It's Sir Geoffrey. But —*suicide!*"

Conway explained to Rungate, "It's suicide all right. We've double-checked. No prints but his. No visitors." He frowned mildly. "Funny there's no note, though. As a rule suicides leave notes. Was he in any trouble?"

Rungate said dubiously, "Not that I know of. He was upset about business, of course. The war situation, you know. Aside from that . . ."

Surprisingly, Framleigh supplied corroboration. "That's true. The war had hit him hard. He sounded quite depressed when I talked with him."

"Ah? You saw him then?"

Framleigh shook his head. "No —just spoke to him on the 'phone. He was to visit us this morning, poor devil."

Conway glanced at Rungate. "And how about you?"

Rungate said, "Yesterday was a legal holiday, so the office was closed. I telephoned him, though. Made an arrangement for the day after tomorrow—the fourteenth."

Conway nodded. "Well, that checks. He jotted memos on both dates." He motioned toward the desk calendar. "Well, I guess there's nothing else—"

Framleigh, who had glanced at the memo pad automatically, started. He glanced up suddenly, a puzzled expression in his eyes. "I say," he said, "this is odd! Did you say the fourteenth, Rungate?"

Rungate nodded. "He had some other business to take care of. He didn't tell me what. He asked me to get the company books in order."

"Quite. But this date . . ."

Rungate glanced sharply at the figures. "That's right. Seven o'clock on the fourteenth."

Detective Conway's tone sounded interested for the first time. "What's odd about it, Mr. Framleigh?"

"Why, it should be fourteen eleven, you know! The day's date first. Only Americans write the month before the day. Sir Geoffrey would never have written it 'eleven fourteen' as it is here. To an Englishman that means the *eleventh* day of the *fourteenth* month—an absolutely impossible date!

"Those figures"—Framleigh inhaled sharply, staring at Rungate, whose face suddenly drained of all color—"must have been altered! By . . ."

In the deathlike silence that followed his hesitation, Officer Conway's words crackled. "By," he concluded, "an *American!* I think you've got something there, Mr. Framleigh. Rungate, didn't you say something about 'company ledgers'? If you don't mind I'd like to have a look at those books."

It was then that Rungate, with their eyes curious and intent upon him, felt a choking tightness about his throat which might have been symbolic.

dead drunk

by . . . . . Frank Kane

Private operator Johnny Liddell, in search of a vanished savant, learns that lip-rouge may look like blood and be just as fatal.

THE BAR AT MIKE'S Deadline Café was lined two deep with refugees from the ad agencies that fill the neighboring skyscrapers along Madison Avenue. Most of them affected the full-dress uniform of the account executive—the pin-striped grey-flannel suit and black knitted tie—and in their hands they carried the badge of their profession, the extra-dry martini.

Johnny Liddell shifted his glass to his left hand, swung around to peer through the lazily swirling smoke that hung like a blue-grey fog between him and the door. Outside the rain beat against the windows, driving streaming rivulets in crooked streams down its surface. Liddell sighed, discovered that his glass was empty, signaled for a refill.

He dug a limp cigarette from his pocket, hung it from the corner of his mouth. He was moodily contemplating the burning end of the match when a girl slid onto the barstool at his side. From the corner of his eye he saw a small pert face, corn-yellow hair on which was perched a blue beret.

"Hi, Muggs—how's the girl reporter?" he asked.

"Soaked," she replied. "Imagine my surprise at finding you here."

"You probably bulldozed Pinky into telling you where I was."

Muggsy snorted. "Ever try to get information out of that rinse-red-head you call a secretary? Sorry to deflate your ego, but I was on my way back to the office from the morgue."

"Anyone I know?"

"You should—Doc Davies was one of the best research chemists in the world." She smiled at the bartender as he slid a drink in front of her.

"Blow himself up?"

Muggsy nodded. "A beaker or something he was holding up to the light—it took half his head with it." She took a deep drink out of her glass. "Not very pretty."

Somewhere a telephone shrilled. The bartender shuffled off to answer it. "It's for you, Liddell," he growled. "Why don't you have a desk moved in here and save wear and tear on both of us."

Liddell took a deep swallow from his glass, ambled down to the bank of phones from the rear. It was the redhead in his office.

"I hate to bother you when you're relaxing," she sniffed, "but this sounded important. She called twice and left a number."

"Let's have it, Pinky."

"Loring 6-2587—the Strathmore Hotel. Ask for Miss Davies. She's waiting for your call."

Liddell nodded as the receiver clicked in his ear. He fished through his pockets, came up with a dime, dialed the number, asked for Miss Davies. She answered so quickly she must have been sitting on the phone.

"This is Liddell," he told her. "My office tells me you've been trying to reach me."

The voice sounded attractive. "I'm very anxious to talk to you. I wonder if you can come right over?"

Liddell stole an apprehensive look at the streaming windows, sighed. "Can you give me some idea what it's about?"

The receiver hesitated for a minute, then, "I want you to find my father."

"When did you last see him, Miss Davies?" he asked mechanically, then as the name struck a familiar chord, he straightened up, "Wait a minute. Your father isn't Dr. Harry Davies?"

"Yes, Mr. Liddell. But the man they have in the morgue isn't my father. I can't discuss it over the phone. Please come."

For the second time in as many minutes, the receiver clicked in his ear. He regarded it briefly, slammed it down on its hook, walked back to the bar.

"Anything important?" Muggsy wanted to know.

Liddell shook his head. "Just a fat dame I recovered a poodle for last week. She called up to complain the beast has fleas."

The blonde looked at him suspiciously. "You wouldn't be holding out on our Muggs, would you?"

"You know me better than that."

"That's why I'm asking." She snagged a cigarette from the pack in front of him, lifted his hand, lit it from his butt.

"This Davies guy. Any family?"

"Daughter."

Liddell made concentric circles on the bar with the bottom of his glass. "She identify him?"

Muggsy shook her head. "An assistant of his—an egg named Merrill. Worked with the old man for years." She wrinkled her nose curiously. "How come you're so interested all of a sudden?"

Liddell took a last drag on his butt, dropped it to the floor, crushed it out with his heel. "That was his daughter on the phone. She claims the old man in the morgue isn't her father. Wants to see me about taking the case."

"Isn't her father? The dame's balmy. Merrill was positive." She pushed back a loose tendril of hair absently. "The body even had Davies' personal stuff on it—wallet, keys and all. Now why would she say it wasn't him?"

"There's one way to find out."

Muggsy drained her glass. "That's to have a talk with her," she concurred. "Let's go."

"What do you mean let's? She invited *me*. If she was throwing a party she'd have said RSVP. You're staying here."

"You can't do that to me, Johnny. It's a pip of a story," the blonde wailed. "Besides, if you're going paying calls on Ann Davies you might be glad to have some protection along."

"You mean she's a dish?" Liddell brightened. "That's the first nice thing that's happened to me all day. Now you're staying for sure."

Ann Davies opened the door in response to his knock. She was almost as tall as his 5′11″, her thick black hair was caught behind the ears with a blue ribbon, allowed to cascade down over her shoulders. Her face looked as though it had been freshly scrubbed. It was devoid of all make-up except lipstick. There were faint purple shadows under her eyes that served only to highlight their startling blue. The housecoat she wore fought a losing battle to mask the fine fullness of her breasts.

The blue eyes returned his inventory, seemed to like what they saw. She smiled, stood aside. "Thanks for coming." She took his hat, tossed it onto a small table, led the way into the sitting room of the suite. "I hope you'll forgive my appearance. I don't seem to be able to get anything done. This has me terribly upset."

Liddell nodded, couldn't manage to look unhappy at her appearance. He waited until she had dropped on the couch, accepted her invitation to sit alongside her.

"I suppose you think I'm crazy?" She leaned forward, took a cigarette, seemed oblivious to the effect it created, settled back. "No matter what anyone says I will not believe that man in the morgue is my father."

Liddell supplied a light, waited until she had taken a deep drag, let it dribble slowly from between half parted lips. "I understood he was positively identified from personal effects by his assistant, a guy named Merrill."

"Just the same it isn't my father. I think I should know."

Liddell struggled to keep his eyes off her as she leaned forward to tap a thin collar of ash from the cigarette, happily lost the struggle. "Intuition?"

When she shrugged it was a production. "Partly. But more important than that was the fact that they didn't find his glasses."

Liddell leaned back, ridged his forehead in concentration. "What about his glasses?"

"He was terribly nearsighted—couldn't see a foot in front of him without them. It would be absolutely impossible for him to be working in the lab without them."

Liddell picked the cigarette from between her fingers, took a deep drag, considered. "Any number of things could have happened to his glasses in an explosion and fire."

"All his other belongings were found intact," she stated. "Why should his glasses be missing?" She leaned forward. "You know why? Because they're the only things he'd have to have with him if he were to disappear."

"Why should he do that?"

"He was afraid, Johnny—scared stiff." She took back her cigarette, puffed on it. "You've heard of the work he was doing?"

"Just generally."

She put out the cigarette, leaned back, slid her arm along the top of the couch. The fragile fabric of the housecoat seemed in imminent danger of losing the thankless struggle to restrain her opulent superstructure. "He was developing a synthetic petroleum that could be produced so cheaply that it would make all present processes obsolete."

Liddell whistled noiselessly. "That might make him unpopular in a lot of powerful quarters."

"Powerful and dangerous. What you don't know is that he completed his work. He was getting ready to turn the process over to the Government"—a faintly bitter tone crept into her voice—"even though the representatives of a big petroleum syndicate offered him a half million to suppress his findings."

"You didn't approve of his turning it down, I take it?"

A rueful smile crinkled the corners of her eyes. "I guess I'm materialistic, but somehow I prefer a half million cash to a Government citation which with a nickle doesn't even get you a telephone call any more." The smile faded. "Besides which, they threatened him."

"Who's the *they* you're talking about?"

"Two men that came to the house last Thursday. Their names were Condon and Simons. I got the impression the big one, Condon, was just a bodyguard. Simons did all the talking."

Liddell nodded.

"They said they represented the syndicate and were prepared to pay a half million. My father ordered them out of the house." She studied the end of a highly shellacked nail. "They accused him of reneging and

said there was more than one way to suppress the process. They told him where to get in touch with them if he changed his mind."

"I see." Liddell pinched his nostrils between thumb and forefinger. "Then why not take your suspicions to the Federal authorities? They'd be glad to give him protection if the process is what you say it is."

She pursed her full lips, half-veiled her eyes with her lids. "Because when he's found I want to talk to him first. I don't want him committed into giving his process away."

"I see."

The girl slid closer until he could feel her thigh against his. "I wonder if you do?" Her voice was low, caressing. "I'm only thinking of him. Why should he have to hide for the rest of his life? Why shouldn't he enjoy the comfort and security a half million dollars could give him?" He could feel her soft breath on his cheek. When he turned her lips were inches from his, half parted, desirable. "Why shouldn't I have it too?"

"And if I take the case?"

"You wouldn't regret it." She leaned forward, covered his mouth with hers. After a moment she drew back. "That's just a down payment."

"I really ought to have a retainer," he grinned. "I never take a case on spec."

He took the case.

The lobby of the Hotel Ambassador was furnished in modernistic style, with brightly colored couches and chrome chairs and tables, complementing the soft, restful pastel carpeting. Johnny Liddell crossed the lobby, approached the impeccable creature behind the desk.

"Mr. Simons, please."

The creature raised heavy-lidded eyes from a critical examination of the carnation in his buttonhole. "Mr. Simons has the penthouse suite, sir." He adjusted the edge of a cuff that peeped from under the end of his sleeve. "Are you expected?"

"Tell him the name's Liddell. It's about Doc Davies."

The man behind the desk made a production of lifting a phone, whispered into it. Finally, he dropped it on its cradle, nodded. "You may go up."

The man who opened the door to the penthouse suite was heavy in the shoulders. The lines of his big jaw were just beginning to round out into a suspicion of a double chin. His eyes were slate colored, mean, buttressed by small pouches. He stood aside as Liddell walked in, closed the door, fell in behind him. Liddell felt the sharp nose of a gun poke into his back.

"My friend is nervous about guns, especially when they're in someone else's hands," he grunted. His hand slid around Liddell, tugged the .45 from his shoulder-holster. "Okay, we can go in now."

Simons was sprawled on an oversized couch against the wall in the inner room. He was wearing a bright blue dressing-gown, a yellow

ascot cravat knotted about his neck. His eyes were blue chips as he watched Liddell enter. He waved him negligently to a chair. "You wanted to see me?" There was a lazy smile pasted on his face.

"Here's his calling card." The big man, Condon, held up the .45, tossed it on the couch alongside Simons, then took up his position at the end of the couch. His eyes didn't leave Liddell.

"I'm investigating the death of Dr. Davies."

A look of annoyance clouded Simons' eyes, passed quickly. "What is there to investigate? A clumsy fool makes a mistake . . ." He shrugged.

"I understand you were interested in his new process."

"Mildly."

Liddell grinned bleakly. "Interested enough to threaten him."

Simons dropped his eyes, made a production of selecting a cigarette, fitting it into a silver holder. "I must have been misquoted." He tilted the holder at an angle in the corner of his mouth, permitted Condon to light it. "I merely told the good doctor I disapproved of his business ethics. I had come prepared to buy the process."

"What made you think he'd sell."

"He offered to. He even set the price." Simons took the holder from between his teeth, rolled it between thumb and forefinger. "He was foolish enough to think he could hold us up for more."

"You're a liar," Liddell growled.

The guard walked over to where Liddell sat, caught him by the lapels, dragged him to his feet. Liddell broke the man's hold with a quick upward and outward fling of his hands, smashed the tip of his toe into Condon's instep. The man roared with pain, dropped his guard. Liddell sank his left into the other man's middle, chopped down against the side of his jaw with his right. Condon hit the floor without a sound, lay there.

"Very effective," Simons applauded. He held Liddell's gun, its snout pointed at the detective's midsection. "But unnecessary. Condon is proud of his ability with his fists. Too proud it would seem under the circumstances." His eyes flicked to the unconscious man at his feet. "As it happens, his defense of my honor was unnecessary. Dr. Davies did offer to sell at a stipulated price, then changed his mind." He waved Liddell back to his chair with the snout of the .45.

The private detective ignored the gun, walked over to a glass-topped table, helped himself to a cigarette. "In that case, his death was a real break for you. Your combine saves a half million."

Simons sighed. "Unfortunately you're wrong."

"Meaning?"

The man on the couch watched Liddell light his cigarette, flip the spent match at an ashtray. "Meaning that someone else has Davies' process and has upped the price."

The cigarette stopped halfway to Liddell's lips. "Who?"

Simons smiled frostily. "Don't you think you've pried deeply enough into my affairs already? The only reason I consented to see you is because I thought you were the new owner's agent. Since you aren't, perhaps you'll be good enough to leave." He nodded to the man on the floor, who was beginning to groan his way back to consciousness. "I'd hate to have my furniture smashed." He handed Liddell back his gun.

From the lobby of the Ambassador Liddell made two calls. The first was disappointing. The operator at the Strathmore informed him in chilled tones that Miss Ann Davies had checked out of the hotel less than an hour before. The second was more encouraging.

"Good evening—New York Advance."

"Miss Kiely in, Chloe?"

Some of the impersonal chill went out of the metallic voice on the other end. "I think so, Mr. Liddell. One moment."

Muggsy was less than enthusiastic. "What's the matter? La Davies kick you out?"

"I need some help, Muggs," Liddell confessed. "Can you get over to the coffee shop at the Ambassador right away?"

"What for?"

"I want the lobby covered but by now they've probably sicked the house dick on me. They don't know you."

"A story in it?" the receiver demanded cautiously.

"A pip."

"I'll be right over," she snapped.

Liddell was on his second cup of coffee when Muggsy walked into the coffee shop. She slid into the booth next to him.

"What's it all about?"

Liddell ordered two more coffees, told her of his conversations with Ann Davies and Simons. "So, Simons is expecting the contact man any minute. I want to know who he is."

Muggsy waited until the waitress had placed two cups of coffee in front of them, collected Liddell's empty cup. "Maybe Ann Davies is right. Maybe her old man *is* alive?"

"That shouldn't be too hard to check. How about getting the old boy's dental chart and comparing?"

"You didn't see that corpse. There's not a tooth left to check. I told you the beaker exploded right in his face." She sipped at her coffee, burned her tongue, grimaced. "Incidentally, after you left the Deadline, I called the coroner's office. Ann was right. He didn't mention finding any optical glass on the floor or the metal rims of the glasses."

Liddell swore under his breath. "We've got to know who makes that contact, Muggs. Will you handle it?"

The blonde nodded. "I'm a sucker, but I'll do it." She leaned closer to Liddell, peered at his lips. "Well, I'll be hung. That little visit with Ann Davies must have been an interesting one. Or is that your own lipstick?"

Liddell wiped his mouth with

the back of his hand, peered at it. "Lipstick, Hell. That's blood—my blood. I told you that bruiser upstairs took a poke at me."

Muggsy snorted. "You ought to rent out for transfusions to Helena Rubinstein then. I know Orchid Rose when I see it. Besides, your blood isn't purple!" She got up from the table, stamped through the coffee shop into the lobby.

Liddell hadn't long to wait. Twenty minutes later, Muggsy was back, slid into the booth at his side. "Your contact man is here, Sherlock. Guess who?"

Liddell shook his head. "Not Ann?"

"No—but somebody else you know. Spats Ladrone—and in a chauffeur's uniform!" She tossed her head, pushed a loose tendril of hair into place. "I was at the desk when he asked for Simons. Said it was about Dr. Davies."

"Ladrone?" Liddell scowled. "Where does he fit into this mess? He's a gunman." He signaled for the waitress. "How much do I owe you?"

She pulled a pad from her pocket wearily, added up a row of figures. He dropped a bill and some change on the table, led Muggsy out to the street. "Keep your eye peeled. When you see him come out give me the high sign. I'll watch the other exit."

Spats Ladrone was thin and dark. He stepped out of the side entrance to the Ambassador, squinted in the sunlight. He turned left, headed east. Liddell, standing in the shadow of a doorway across the street, moved the same way. Ladrone was obviously heading for a large black sedan parked near the far corner. Liddell mentally made note of the license plate, closed in on Ladrone. He caught him by the arm, swung him around.

"Hello, Spats—going to a masquerade?"

The dark man's eyes narrowed when he recognized Liddell. "Hello, Liddell—what do you want?"

"Why the get-up?" Liddell flicked an imaginary spot of dust from the chauffeur's shoulder.

"Maybe I'm going straight like they say in the movies," Ladrone sneered. "Maybe it's none of your business."

"You wouldn't be working for Dr. Davies, would you, Spats?"

Ladrone's eyes narrowed cautiously. "Look, pal. You got nothing on me. I don't have to answer any of your questions. Blow!"

Liddell shrugged. "Okay, but as an old friend I just thought you might like to know the cops aren't satisfied with the old man's death."

Ladrone's lips lifted from his teeth in what passed for a smile. "No kidding? I'll bet the old boy ain't none too pleased either. They're burying him tomorrow." He swung on his heel, headed for the sedan, slammed the door after him.

Liddell's eyes were thoughtful as he watched the big car melt into the westbound traffic, swing north at the corner. He was still scowling when Muggsy caught up with him.

"I saw you talking to him. Get

anything out of him?" she asked.

Liddell shook his head. "How long would it take you to check through on a car registration?" He consulted his watch. "I just want to be sure it's Davies' car he's driving."

"Couple of hours," Muggsy guessed. "We can go over to my place until it comes through. That is, unless you're too tired?"

It was almost ten when the information came through. Muggsy's apartment was in darkness. The phone jangled impatiently on the hall stand. Liddell groaned, got up off the couch, stumbled out to the foyer.

"Liddell?" the voice on the other end demanded.

"Yeah."

"This is Lewis at the Advance. Sorry to take so long about checking that registration, but the motor vehicle office was closed by the time Muggs called in and we had to do it the hard way."

Liddell nodded impatiently. "Did you get it?"

"Yeah. The car's registered in the name of Harry L. Davies, Sayville, L. I."

"Thanks, Lewis." Liddell raked his fingers through his hair, hung the phone back on its hook.

"Get what you wanted, Johnny?" Muggsy's sleepy voice came from the inside room.

Liddell snapped on the foyer light, nodded. "It was Davies' car all right. Ladrone must be acting as combination bodyguard and chauffeur for the old man." He yawned, looked at his watch. "How long's it take to drive out to Sayville?"

"Sayville?" Muggsy groaned. "Not tonight!"

"How long?"

"About two hours." There was a slight pause. "Hey, it'd be after midnight by the time you got there. You can't go calling at that hour. Why don't you telephone?"

"Grow up. Besides, Davies is dead and midnight is the hour when ghosts walk. I got a sudden yearning to meet a ghost."

Dr. Davies' combination home-and-lab was a long low ranch-type building that sprawled over half an acre. Liddell turned in at the stone pillars that identified the house, parked the convertible near the entrance. He looked at the two other cars in the driveway, scowled at the lighted windows.

"Looks like he's having a party," he growled. "Let's crash."

Muggsy shrugged. "I hope they're not serving ice cream. I've got goose pimples already."

Liddell led the way to the door, knocked. After a moment it swung open. A big man stood framed in the doorway. "Who'd you want?"

Liddell tried to see past the man, gave up. "I'm a friend of Ann Davies'. She asked me to drop out."

"Come in." The man in the doorway stepped aside, waited until both were in. He was big all over, wore his hat on the back of his head,

chewed gum incessantly. "What'd you say your name was?"

"I didn't say."

The big man smiled amiably. "Then suppose I ask." His eyes roamed over Liddell, stopped at the bulge under his left arm. "You wouldn't be carrying a gun?"

Liddell's hand started for the left lapel, stopped when the big man brought a .38 from nowhere. Liddell's hand froze where it was.

"Now that you mention it, I *was* carrying one." He made no effort to resist as the big man relieved him of the .45.

"Got a license for this, mister?"

Liddell squinted at him. "You the law?"

"Deputy sheriff. You didn't answer my question."

Liddell let his breath out with a relieved whistle. "It's licensed. I'm a private eye. Papers in my wallet." He nodded toward his breast pocket.

The big man reached in, brought out the wallet, skimmed through the papers. "Okay." He handed back the gun. "What'd you want?"

"Ann Davies."

The big man grinned. "Us too." He headed down the hall toward an open door. "Come on back here."

Liddell and Muggsy followed, stopped at the entrance to the room. A man was sprawled out on the floor, his head a bloody mass. A .32 lay nearby.

"Ever see this guy before?" the deputy sheriff wanted to know.

Liddell nodded. "His name's Condon—he lives at the Ambassador."

The deputy sheriff looked inquiringly at the other occupant of the room, a youngish man with glasses, his crew-cut close to his scalp. "That check with your information. Mr. Merrill?"

The man with the crew-cut nodded. "I didn't know where he was staying but that's the name he used when he visited the doctor a week or so ago."

"Mind telling us what it's all about?" Liddell asked.

The deputy sheriff shrugged. "Just got here myself. Mr. Merrill here came back from town, found him laying here." He turned to Merrill. "What time did you go into town, Mr. Merrill?"

Merrill shrugged uncertainly. "About nine. Ann could probably give you the time. She was here when I left."

"Where is she now?" Liddell asked.

"I don't know." Merrill looked at Liddell. "I went up to see if she was all right but all her clothes and things are gone."

Liddell walked over, studied the gun on the floor. "Wasn't shot, was he?"

The deputy sheriff shook his head. "Gun hasn't been fired. They beat him over the head with it. Works just as good on both ends."

"Means whoever was holding the gun didn't scare Condon. He let them get close enough to do that to him."

The deputy sheriff nodded. "That's why I'd like to have a lit-

tle talk with your friend Miss Davies." There was a screeching of brakes from out front. "That'd be the coroner. Still ain't got those brakes fixed." He walked toward the front door.

"He thinks Ann did it," Merrill told Liddell miserably. "I'm sure she didn't. She was upset but—"

"How about the chauffeur, Ladrone?"

Merrill wrinkled his brows in a puzzled frown. "Spats, you mean? Why would he do it?"

"Who hired him?"

"Why—Ann, I guess. She had charge of hiring all the help. Why?"

"Because he's no more a chauffeur than you are. He's a hired gunman with a record as long as your arm. When you find Spats you'll find the killer."

Liddell waited until he was beyond the town limits of Sayville before he pulled in at a tavern. He parked Muggsy at the bar with orders to stay put, headed for the telephone. In a moment he was connected with Simons.

The voice on the other end sounded annoyed. "What do you want, Liddell?"

"I just saw your buddy Condon."

Simons laughed softly. "And you can still walk. When I last saw him he was promising all sorts of unpleasant things to—"

"He's dead."

There was no mistaking the genuineness of the gasp over the phone. "Where?" Simons wanted to know.

"He was beaten to death in Doc Davies' study. If you're smart—"

"I can handle this, Liddell."

"Don't be a sucker, Simons. They're playing with loaded dice. Condon thought he could handle it—he's dead," Liddell argued. "What was he doing out there?"

Simons hesitated for a minute. "Negotiating."

"You said someone had the process and would sell. Who was it?"

"The daughter."

Liddell's jaw dropped. "You leveling? When did you strike the deal?"

"Early this afternoon," the receiver told him. "I told her we'd have to have proof that she had the process. The chauffeur brought the proof. Enough to convince us she knew more about it than just a layman."

"The chauffeur, eh? Didn't you deal directly with Ann?"

"No. The chauffeur was go-between both times."

"Did Condon bring the money when he went?"

"No—he thought he could muscle her into taking less." His voice sounded agitated. "We'll be ruined. The syndicate faces a loss of millions."

Liddell grinned bleakly. "You're more likely to lose more—your life—if we don't nail the killer, and soon." He hung up, rejoined Muggsy at the bar.

"Well?" She pushed a bourbon and soda in front of him.

"It was Ann, apparently. She had Condon meet her out there. Claimed

she had the process." He took a drink from the glass, scowled. "She thought he had the money, hit him on the head, then beat it."

"Where does Ladrone fit in?"

Liddell shrugged, emptied his glass, signaled for a refill. "Looks like he and the girl were in it together. He's been doing all the contact and strongarm work."

"No wonder she wanted to make it look like the old man was still alive. That way she could exert even more pressure on the syndicate. Do you think she has the process?"

Liddell shook his head. "If she did have, they wouldn't have needed to kill Condon. They were planning a juicy double-cross—get Condon to bring the money out, knock him off, take the money."

"There's one thing I like about you, Liddell — your taste in women!"

The bartender set another round in front of them, scooped up the change from the bar, flat footed it down to the cash register. Liddell rubbed the heel of his hand along his jaw.

"What was the name of that babe Ladrone used to play house with?"

"The little blonde that hung out on Fifty-second Street?"

Liddell nodded.

"Mae something. Mae . . ." She snapped her fingers. "May Lavery. She practically lives in that upholstered sewer near the corner —what's its name? The Bop Beat or something like that—why, Johnny?"

"I've got a sudden yearning for some cultural music. Let's pay a visit to the Bop Beat and let Dizzy Steinway send us."

The Bop Beat was a small converted basement in an old brownstone near the corner of 52nd Street. A large three-sheet announced that Whistler Wilhausen was playing an extended engagement and that his cultural contribution would be further enhanced by a stripper named Winny Rode.

Inside it was a small foul-smelling cellar. Clouds of stagnant smoke eddied near the ceiling and seemed to hover over the postage stamp sized dance floor surrounded by tables. Along one side of the room was a large bar, presided over by a tremendous Negro sporting a small vandyke.

"It's crazy, that's what it is, friend, crazy," he greeted Liddell, big white teeth gleaming in the shining black of his face. "They'll stone you. It's crazier'n that."

"Save it for the tourists, pal," Liddell grinned. "Just give us a nice normal bourbon and soda."

The Negro grinned at them. "Okay, boss." He caught a bottle from the backbar, tilted it over a glass. "Better give you double if you want to taste it," he advised.

Liddell nodded, turned his back to the bar, squinted through the smoke. "Mae Lavery still hang out here?"

The bartender flashed his big teeth in another wide-mouthed grin. "All the time, mister, all the time." He leaned across the bar. "There she is now—table near the far wall."

Liddell slid two bills across the bar, waved off the change. "Let's go keep Mae company, Muggs." He led the way. "Hi, Mae."

She rolled watery eyes up, had difficulty focusing them. "Who are you?" Her eyes rolled over to Muggsy. "I don't know you."

Liddell pulled up two chairs. "I'm looking for a friend of yours —Spats Ladrone."

The girl at the table scowled, then spat. "That rat!" She stared at Liddell for a moment. "Now I make you—you're a copper."

Liddell waved down a waitress, pointed at Mae's glass. "Fill it."

Mae put her hand over the top of the glass. "Not this junk. Give me a scotch as long as he's paying."

"I thought Spats was your boy, Mae," Liddell said.

Mae snorted drunkenly, shook her head. "Ain't seen Spats in weeks." Her eyes filled with self-pity. "Good enough for him when he's broke but now he's got a fancier girl." She wiped her nose with the back of her hand. "But I'll get even."

"Do you know who she is, Mae?"

"I didn't until yesterday."

"How'd you find out?"

Mae leaned back, laughed. "He's a great detective, asks me how *I* found out. Hand me my bag."

Muggsy handed over the bag, watched while the blonde fumbled through it, came up with a newspaper clipping. "There's how I found out. Her picture was in the paper." She handed the clipping to Liddell who showed it to Muggs.

"Ann Davies. Well, well!"

Liddell handed the picture back. "How do you know this is Spats' new girl, Mae?"

"Last time I saw him he had her picture. And I seen them again. Riding around together."

"When?"

"A look of cunning gleamed in her eyes. "Why should I tell *you?*"

Liddell laid a five on the table. "Because we're friends."

She stared down at the five for a moment, wet her lips with her tongue, then reached out, speared it. "She's at his place right now." The tears of self-pity spilled out on her cheeks. "I been waiting there every night, watching for him. Tonight he shows up and she's with him, the dirty no-good rat. I was good enough for him before."

"Where's his place, Mae?"

She looked up, her make-up smeared by the tears, a thin black stream of mascara down her cheek. "He's got a trap on Sixty-fifth Street, next to the garage. She's there now."

Liddell parked the convertible on 65th Street, walked to the corner of Third. The house next to the garage was dark. He crossed the street, cautiously mounted the tall stairway to the first-floor entrance, tried the knob. It turned in his

hand. He started down the hall, froze when the muzzle of a gun bore into his kidneys.

"Hello, peeper." Ladrone's voice was low. "I've been expecting you. Go on to the door at the end of the hall." He jabbed again with the gun muzzle. "Just keep the hands out where I can see them."

Liddell came to a stop at a door. "Push it open," Ladrone ordered.

"You thought Mae would sell me out," he chuckled. "I'll take that cannon of yours now." He slid his hand under Liddell's jacket, came up with the forty-five. "I hope you don't mind my little friend here pointing."

"You can put up the gun, Spats. It won't do you any good."

Ladrone grinned. "You sound like you're afraid of my little friend."

Liddell seemed unimpressed. "He can't talk loud enough to keep you out of the electric chair."

The grin faded slowly from Ladrone's face. "What are you trying to pull?"

"I'm not the one pulling something. Your partner is. Condon was killed tonight out at the lab and you're candidate number one for the rap."

"You're a liar—you're trying to steam me up!"

"No? You went to Simons, set him up for a date to bring the money out to the lab tonight. You and your partner were going to double-cross them, take the money and run. What you don't know is that something went wrong. Your partner killed Condon."

Ladrone's finger whitened on the trigger. "In that case I got nothing to lose by burning you down too. I was wrong—you know too much. So long, peeper."

"Drop the gun, Spats," a voice commanded from the doorway.

Involuntarily Ladrone's eyes pivoted to the door. Liddell moved in with a speed of desperation, chopped at the gunman's wrist with the side of his hand. Ladrone dropped the gun with a yelp, tried to ward off the left Liddell threw. A right cross slammed him against the wall, where he slid to the floor.

Liddell picked up the gun. "Nice work, Muggs," he told the girl.

She tried to grin at him. "That gun looked the size of a cannon. I didn't know what to do so I bluffed."

"You couldn't have done better."

"Where's Ann Davies?"

"Around here someplace." Liddell walked to one of the doors to the room, found it to be a bedroom. "Here she is, Muggs."

Ann Davies lay on the bed, her arms tied to her sides, a wide gag around her face. Her eyes widened at the sight of Liddell. He loosened the gag, cut the ropes.

"*Johnny!* My father—over there on the other bed. Is he all right?"

Liddell walked over to the bed, flicked back an eyelid. "Doped. He'll be all right."

"We've got to get him out of here before that man gets back."

Liddell grinned bleakly. "Don't

worry about Ladrone, Ann. When he wakes up he'll be as harmless as a kitten." He walked over to the telephone on the night table.

"Inspector? This is Liddell. Can you send a couple of men here to pick up Spats Ladrone? Yeah. He'll be wanted in a murder case on the Island." The receiver chattered back at him. "No, he didn't do the actual killing, his partner did. Yeah. Will you call the Sheriff out at Sayville and tell him to hold Tom Merrill for murder? Thanks."

"Merrill?" Muggsy gasped. "The old man's assistant?"

Ann Davies nodded. "That's right. But how did you know?"

"It was either you or him. It had to be somebody your father trusted enough to be able to kidnap him at a time when he was scared of every shadow. You both knew about Simons and his offer. One of you decided to accept it."

"But my father would never sell. I told you that."

Liddell nodded. "Merrill opened negotiations with Simons without telling your father. The night they showed up it was an accident that they got to him."

"And they thought he had really offered to sell?" Muggsy asked.

"Right. Merrill planned to have Ladrone kidnap Ann and use that to force Davies to sell."

"What went wrong?"

"Your father finished his work sooner than Merrill expected. He announced that he was going to turn the process over to the Government. Merrill decided to kidnap him instead. Then, he started negotiations in your name with Simons. They demanded proof that you had some knowledge of the process. That was the tip-off."

"But why murder Condon?"

Liddell shrugged. "A bad break. Simons sent Condon to have a look before he went. Condon didn't have the money but Merrill thought he did. When Condon started snooping around Merrill hit him on the head. He got excited and killed him.

"Anyway, that's how friend Merrill puts himself in the chair. I'm sure he'll be able to prove the body they used as a substitute for Davies was already a corpse when the explosion took place."

Ann Davies took a last drag on her cigarette. "How can you be sure it was Merrill?"

"Ladrone wouldn't have used a thirty-two. But it wasn't Ladrone they were setting up as the fall guy. It was you."

"Me?" Ann's face paled.

Liddell shrugged. "Simons would testify he was dealing with you. Merrill testified you were at the lab when he left. You fitted all the other characteristics of the one who set up the plot."

"But—Ladrone came to me and said he had my father. I went along so he wouldn't be hurt. I owe you more than I can ever pay you, Johnny."

"I wouldn't say that." Liddell grinned. "You can pay it off in installments."

the e-string murder

by . . . Mignon G. Eberhart

Dead men may not be tale bearers, but an uninvited corpse can raise havoc with the life of its finder.

IN SPITE OF THE DRIZZLING rain and sleet Orchestra Hall was packed that afternoon. When I finally came out on the street I found that an early winter dusk had fallen. Already the million lights of the Loop were twinkling through the fog and reflecting themselves dimly on the shining wet pavements. A chill wind was blowing off the lake. I pulled the soft fur of my coat closer about me and settled my tailored hat more firmly.

Tonight the lighted windows along the boulevard did not attract me as usual and opposite the misted windows of the art institute I paused irresolutely, waiting for the stream of traffic to turn. The drive homeward would be long and dreary. Following an afternoon of Tschaikowsky and Rachmaninoff I felt not exhilarated as usual but unnaturally depressed.

The long two-noted whistle of the traffic policeman, sounding weirdly through the dull roar, decided me. Crossing the street I stopped in at a tea-shop just off the boulevard. I lingered over my tea and it must have been around six o'clock when I started the drive toward my own apartment. It was sleeting in good earnest by that

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There exists a very select group of authors able to surround such sordid topics as murder, arson, theft and fraud with an aura of invincible respectability. All of them are justly renowned and, perhaps more significant, all of them are women. A notable member is Mrs. Eberhart, who has made her entirely fictional Susan Dare a wholly factual household name. Chicago-bred, Mrs. Eberhart again uses her home city for locale in a hair-curling tale of another Registered Nurse turned detective in self-defense. Mel Standish, spinster, copes with crime as if it were a bedpan.

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time and the pavements were glistening and slippery.

I drove carefully. The lonely warehouse district seemed particularly foreboding, I remember, and I thought uneasily of the one good diamond which I possess and always wear. However I emerged without any misadventure. As the apartments took on a more respectable and finally luxurious appearance I felt somewhat ashamed of my qualms.

As I turned into the park the headlights of another car loomed suddenly at my right. Furiously I shoved on my brakes, so furiously that on the slippery pavement my little coupé skidded to one side and stopped abruptly at the edge of the bridle-path. The other car, a heavy limousine, had swerved and with a grinding of gears was off at the same headlong speed of its approach.

Angrily I peered after it—it looked like the Townsend car. It passed under the great park light and I caught a fleeting glimpse of its license number. It *was* the Townsend car. Doubtless young Shive Townsend was driving.

"Young idiot!" I grumbled as I backed cautiously out of the path. "Probably half stewed."

It could not have been more than three minutes later that I turned into the drive back of the roomy old apartment-house where I lived and into the long partitioned garage I shared with the other tenants. Sure enough, the Townsend limousine was out.

I remember I was humming the opening motif of Rachmaninoff's famous Prelude in C# as I fumbled for the garage key in my bag. I was facing the garage door, my hand on the lock, when all at once I heard a sound back of me. I whirled. The sleet had stopped a little but the fog was heavy. Through it I saw a figure moving. My nerves may have been a little unstrung, for I called sharply, "Who is it?"

The figure—I could see its bare outline and that indistinctly—paused abruptly, then vanished into the mist. I heard steps running—running with a queer slapping sound that gradually diminished to an indistinct shuffle, then finally were gone.

My heart thumped and I shivered. I glanced up to the first floor east and the light of my own kitchen window reassured me. Norah was there and a delicious hot dinner was waiting for me.

I shrugged my shoulders, resumed my humming—in sheer bravado this time—and walked up the area way and through the court to the front entrance. The doorman, Perkins, was evidently at his dinner, for the long white length of the lobby was empty, the lights revealing a bare expanse of tiled floors with here and there a rug, a few chaste and correct chairs and lounges and the hideous potted palms which I had always loathed and tried in vain to have removed.

The elevator cage stood at the far end, its door closed. Dennis was probably at full length on the floor, reveling in the adventures of *Des-*

perate Dick. As I advanced toward it I bent to pick up a small dark object that lay near the rug. It turned out to be a glove, a short fancy gauntlet of brown kid.

It was very small, evidently not mine or Edith's, for we are both large women. Anyway, I did not recognize it. Absently I slipped it into my pocket, thinking to ask Perkins about it, and opened the door to the elevator cage.

To my surprise the cage was dark, only a little light coming through the grille-work. My eyes, after the bright lights of the lobby, did not focus immediately and I stumbled on something as I entered. The door behind me slid silently shut. I moved suddenly. I had stepped on something soft and yielding.

"A lost fur piece," I thought and stooped.

My bare, outstretched hand encountered hair and then in quiet horror—a human face, a face that was singularly clammy and cold!

I think I must have screamed. I found myself frantically pulling at the latch of the sliding door. It stuck. The very hair on my head stirred and my teeth chattered foolishly. With a frantic effort I controlled my shaking fingers. All at once the door moved open and the welcome light streamed in.

My only thought was to flee but I turned, steeling myself. "Don't be a fool, Mel Standish," I remember saying aloud. "You—twenty years a nurse!" I forced myself to look.

It was a dreadful sight. Crumpled queerly on the floor of the cage lay a man—eyes staring hideously, mouth wide with tongue protruding, expression of ghastly fear on every feature. The face was uncommonly swollen and purplish. I leaned closer and was sure. The man had been strangled!

I tried to touch him but could not. In my profession I have seen death many times but never such death as this. With relief I remembered the law—it would be better not to touch him. The man was dead. I could not help him. But I had to do something, call a doctor, notify the police.

I ran toward the street. A park policeman usually stood at the intersection just outside. I think it was sleeting again when I came upon the bulky figure of the policeman. He seemed slow and dull and reluctant to move.

"But the man is murdered!" I remember saying. At that he came.

We were only across the street from the apartment house and I could see the door and most of the lobby every inch of the way back. I could swear no one entered or left the place. But when we approached the elevator its interior was lighted!

I had left it still dark, with only the light from the lobby penetrating its gloom. And now it was lighted! Someone had been there during my absence! I started to tell this to the policeman but some fortunate impulse restrained me. He had lost his ruddy color and was staring stupidly into the elevator.

"Do you know who it is?"

He glanced at me sharply. "No," he said and cleared his throat. "Never saw him before." He refused to look at me.

"There's the phone." I pointed toward the recess at one side. "Aren't you going to call a doctor or—somebody?"

The man hesitated. "Yes," he said finally but as he still hesitated I moved impatiently toward the telephone.

"I'll do it!" I said. He stopped me hastily.

"No! *No!* Here—" He crossed to the booth and carefully closed its door. I listened in natural interest but could hear nothing. However I could see him through the glass door and I'm positive he called two numbers. However, when he came out he said he had rung only the street station and that they would be out.

I might have inquired further, for I am a woman of determination, but at that second I heard steps on the side stairs at the other side of the elevator shaft and looked up to see Jimmy Davidson, of all people, descending.

"Hello, Aunt Mel," he called flippantly. Then, catching sight of the policeman, he paused for an obvious breath before adding, "What's the trouble—burglars?" Suddenly Jimmy's eyes narrowed. "Oh—it's *you,* O'Brand!" His voice lost its gayety, a gayety which had rung a bit false, and became the cool voice of the Jimmy Davidson whose achievements in the newspaper world were becoming more pronounced.

"Now, look here, Davidson," began O'Brand and stopped.

"What's the trouble?"

O'Brand seemed in a quandary. There was a none-too-pleasant gleam in his eye as he faced Jimmy. Without a word I pointed.

"Whew!" Jimmy whistled softly. In the silence that followed I heard the clang-clang of a nearing patrol wagon. Its approach must have spurred O'Brand, for he took a step forward, his huge hand on Jimmy's arm.

"Look here," he mumbled. "No stories about this—*mind.*"

Jimmy jerked away from him. "What do you mean?"

O'Brand closed one eye in a wink that was not at all friendly. Before he could say more the patrol wagon was at the door and straightaway the hall was filled with blue-coated men. One—in dark serge carrying a medicine case—knelt by the dead man, questioning O'Brand.

Suddenly I discovered that my knees were trembling. I walked past the group near the elevator, up the short flight of stairs and entered my own apartment. Automatically I snapped on the lights in the living room and sank wearily into a chair, staring into space and seeing what I had seen in the dark cage of the elevator not twenty minutes before.

Gradually, I became aware of Pank's silky fur brushing against my hands and her steady coaxing purr. She is ecstatic whenever she succeeds in snuggling into my seal coat. I felt her burrowing luxuriously into its folds.

In a moment, though, she ceased purring and began to dig into the pocket. With her unerring and at times embarrassing faculty for smelling out and vigorously investigating anything strange to her, she was after the glove I had picked up in the lobby.

I drew it out casually, laid it on the polished top of the spinet desk, which was presumably forbidden ground for Pank, and promptly forgot it.

The strange and terrible event of the evening had filled my mind to the exclusion of all else. Who was the murdered man? How and by whom was he so brutally done to death? How came he in the elevator cage? A poor place to hide a body! How was it that the cage was lighted when I returned with O'Brand? O'Brand puzzled me—he was either abnormally dull or he had been remarkably reluctant to take any action. I more than half believed he had recognized the dead man.

What other telephone number had he rung? Possibly the coroner—or doctor. What was Jimmy Davidson doing here? If he had come to see me he would have said so. Anyway, Jimmy seldom came save on Sunday afternoons.

Norah spoils Jimmy—in fact, we all spoil him. But for myself, having seen him through measles, whooping cough and mumps, having sent surreptitious candies to the military academy—and equally surreptitious checks later on to help out with fraternity dues and "dates"—having, indeed, been Jimmy's sole family since the death of my dear friend, his mother, I feel it my right to show my pride in him. Edith says Jimmy can wrap me around his little finger but Edith doesn't know a thing about it and talks too much anyway.

Thinking of Edith I looked at my watch—seven-twenty. Surely she should be here. The apartment was quiet, ominously quiet. I roused with a start, unheeding Pank's indignant grunt. Where was Norah!

"Norah," I called. "*Edith!*" There was no sound.

Norah couldn't have gone out. From the garage I had seen the light in the kitchen windows. But I found the dining room and kitchen dark and the lights revealed a dinner in the process of preparation. The gas-jets had been turned off but various pots and pans remained on the stove. French-fried potatoes were soggy in cold grease, the meat was raw on one side and burned on the other, the hot bread a lump of dough—in the oven. Cream half-whipped for dessert was on the table and near it a piece of cake with a bite or two taken out of it. There was no Norah!

In the dining room I found in Norah's handwriting a phone message from Edith.

Mis Edith iz gon to consert and Mis Morisuns fore night.

Well, that explained Edith's absence at least. I wished however

that she had chosen any other night to stay with Lida Morrison. Somehow I disliked the thought of sleeping in the apartment alone that night. Surely Norah would come back.

But she didn't!

I heated the soup, made some coffee and found a chilled salad in the icebox. Just as I was starting to eat the doorbell rang and Jimmy Davidson announced himself.

II

"Let me use the phone, Aunt Mel," he said. "I want to get my story in for the first edition." He brushed past me toward the telephone and I was vaguely surprised by his expression.

I had seen Jimmy on the trail of a story before and usually there was exhilaration in his very bearing. Tonight he looked worried and as he waited to get the number I saw his eyes running carefully over his notes.

From the kitchen, as I made hasty sandwiches and poured another cup of coffee, I could hear phrases of his conversation.

"No—I don't know who he was," he said once. "No—*no!* Nothing but initials on his collar. Better not use them."

And again, "Look up O'Brand's record, will you? O-b-r-a-n-d. Yes."

Then I heard words that brought me, cup in hand, to the hall door. "With the string of a violin. No—string. The string of a violin in a slipknot around his throat."

"Dumbbell!" said Jimmy, hanging up.

"Jimmy Davidson!" I cried. "Do you mean he was strangled with the string of a violin?"

Jimmy nodded slowly.

"Are you sure?"

He glanced at his hands and shivered. "I ought to know. Lead me to the bathroom, Aunt Mel—and some hot water and soap."

A violin string—I couldn't believe it. Who could have done it? How could it have been accomplished? Who in the apartment played a violin?

I thought of Maralie McReynolds, and quick as the thought came I checked it. Not Maralie with her cropped golden hair and great gray eyes and perfect young body. There were thousands of violin strings in Chicago!

"I've got to hustle." Jimmy, looking a little refreshed but still worried was taking a plate of salad from my hands.

"How did you happen to be here?"

He was munching a sandwich and did not answer immediately. "To see you." He gulped a too-large bite. "This coffee is fine. Did you make it? Where's Norah?"

"I don't know. Why did you come—anything special to see me about?"

Jimmy grinned. "No—just because. May I have another? Thanks. Where's Miss Edith?"

"She's at Lida Morrison's."

Jimmy stopped eating. "You're not going to stay here alone to-

night, are you? It's not safe!"

"Nôrah'll be back."

"Hm!" Jimmy resumed his eating for a moment.

"Was Norah here when you rang?" I asked.

"Norah! Oh—er—yes—no. *No!* She wasn't here."

Now if I had ever known Jimmy to lie I'd have thought he was lying then. He looked exceedingly uncomfortable and began to tell me in disjoined sentences what had occurred in the lobby after I left.

In a short time, however, he rose. "Thanks, Aunt Mel. If I don't get downtown in short order that idiot Sanderson will have my story all messed up."

In the living room he paused. "Look here—suppose Norah doesn't show up? What will you—what . . ." His voice trailed away and he took a swift step forward, staring at the desk. "Where did you get that?"

"It was on the floor of the lobby near the elevator as I came in tonight. Belongs to somebody here, I presume. Oh, Pank! She's rubbing yellow hairs on your trousers, Jimmy. Kitty!"

For once Jimmy was oblivious to the cat's attentions. His eyes were fixed on the small brown glove. He reached for it, raised it to his face, sniffed—and his face whitened under my very eyes.

Just then the bell rang and I went to answer. It was only the Townsend's maid, come to tell me that the laundry had got mixed in delivery, and would I give their bundle to her—if I had it. I bade her wait and went to investigate.

Sure enough, on the table in the back entry I found a large bundle of clean laundry, returned that afternoon from Chin Lee's. There was a tag on top with *Tunsin—846* and some Chinese characters. I smiled at the Chinese way of spelling Townsend as we exchanged packages.

"Wasn't the murder awful, ma'am?" The girl spoke in an awestruck tone and I could see she was frightened. "It was my afternoon off—mine and Katie's, the cook, you know—and we went with Miss McReynolds' two girls to a movie. We got home just as they carried him out." She peered at me inquisitively. "They said you found him?"

"The least said the better," I replied sharply. "But there's no need to be frightened now," I said as I saw her chin tremble. I turned to find Jimmy at my elbow, hat and coat in hand.

"I'll be going on," he said. "But Aunt Mel, if Norah doesn't get back you give me a ring and I'll come out and stay here tonight. That is," he said grimly, "unless I work all night."

"Nonsense. I've stayed alone before."

"Not after—not under such circumstances."

His words sent a chill creeping up my backbone. Suppose the murderer were still lurking somewhere in the big old building.

"I've a revolver." I gripped my fleeing courage with both hands.

"And if Norah doesn't get back I'll have Maralie McReynolds come down and spend the night with me."

"Maralie. Oh, yes. Maralie," he repeated oddly. "Well—good night. I may be out later."

I turned the latch carefully after he had gone. At the door of the living room I wheeled, retraced my steps and attached the heavy chain bolt. Then, I am not ashamed to admit, I made a complete circuit of the rooms, locking and bolting doors and windows, Pank stalking gravely behind me.

The wind rattled dismally the French doors opening upon the wide balcony that ran along the front and one side of the apartment. I longed for Edith out in Oak Park —and for stolid Norah. Goodness only knew where!

I tried to settle down to read, picking up the first book that came to my hand. Unfortunately it turned out to be a book about spiritualism—*Ghosts I Have Known,* I think was the title, a relic of Edith's last winter's fad. I had just got to a most alarming specter of a woman who had been mangled in an accident when the bell rang again. I went to the speaking tube.

"It's Marie, Miss Standish," came a meek voice. "Mr. Townsend says I made a mistake about the laundry and will you exchange again."

"Do you mean that it was delivered right in the first place?"

"Yes, please, Miss Standish."

"Wait."

Rather disgustedly I let Marie, her arms full of bundles, enter, and I went to look at the laundry she had brought down a few minutes before. Small inaccuracies annoy me and as I had no desire to keep on trading laundry bundles all night I opened the topmost parcel of that she had first returned. Sheets, pillow cases, towels, all marked "M. S."

"Marie, come here," I called and continued my investigation. Norah's virtuous gray flannel petticoats were in the next parcel, together with some unmistakable garments of my own.

"These are mine," I said. "You were not mistaken the first time. The parcels you are holding do belong to the Townsends."

"But Mr. Townsend says these bundles are yours and that I brought theirs down here—"

"Well, don't you see, I've opened every package? I know this is mine."

Marie looked at the table and looked at me. "Mr. Townsend says I was to be sure to bring those back and to leave these," she reiterated.

"Well, Marie"—I was irritated at the girl's stubbornness—"you go back and tell Mr. Townsend he can have Norah's flannel petticoats if he wants them but I'm sure she needs them herself."

Considering how the affair turned out it was quite extraordinary that I should have said just that.

I had barely got back to my chair when the bell rang again and Mr. Townsend himself appeared. My first thought was that he had come to apologize. He bowed overpolitely, as was his custom but instead of the many and fulsome compliments he

usually offered he came immediately to the point.

"Miss Standish"—he rubbed fat hands smoothly together—"I find I have had the misfortune to lose in the laundry an article, a—er—garment which is very valuable to me. Knowing that the laundry for this apartment and for mine was confused in delivery, I wondered—er—if . . ." He stopped again, his eyes slits of blackness behind the heavy convex lenses of his spectacles.

"Do you mean you would like me to look through my laundry for your—er—garment?"

He made a deprecating gesture. "No, dear Miss Standish. I wouldn't impose upon you to such an extent. Just let *me* do it."

"Sit down, Mr. Townsend. I'll see what I can find."

"No—no, Miss Standish. Pray allow me . . ."

"Sit down." I may have spoken more firmly than I intended. He looked somewhat startled and moved toward a chair.

However, when I was half through the absurd search I felt a presence near me and with a start looked up to see him at my side, his eyes glued on the stacks of linen.

"Mr. Townsend," I said abruptly. "Will you be so good as to return to the living room and wait until I finish?"

He retreated and I glanced quickly through the remaining pieces. "Put these away, Norah," I was surprised to hear myself say, raising my voice as if she were in the next room.

He was not too pleasant when I told him I had found nothing save my own property and did not seem inclined to believe me. But he finally bowed himself out, his protesting thanks belied by a malevolent glitter in his beady eyes.

Rebolting the door and hoping that the silly laundry question was settled, I resumed my seat by the fireplace and gazed thoughtfully into the flames.

My thoughts switched back to the murder. Half-forgotten stories came to my mind and I wondered if in this case there were any possible clues. Usually the murderer left some incriminating clue—but there's nothing incriminating about a violin string. And the cage had been lighted during my short trip across the street to summon O'Brand. But I was the only one who knew of that latter. Oh, yes—there was the glove. I glanced toward the desk and then sat upright to stare. The glove was gone!

This added puzzle was the last straw. I went over and over every possibility only to find myself more confused. Marie — Jimmy — Mr. Townsend—which of the three had taken that glove?

About eleven I was aroused by Pank stirring on my knees. She was peering steadily into the blackness beyond the French doors leading to the balcony. Suddenly her ears flattened nastily and, like a flash, she leaped to the top of the bookcase, her back arched, her every hair

erect, her lips drawn back in a soundless snarl.

My breath stopped and my muscles tensed. Mastering myself with considerable effort I walked over to the doors, expecting I don't know what horror—and pulled the heavy velour shades. Then, though I remembered having locked them, I tried the latches. One held—but the other was not locked!

I turned the key, switched on all the lights in the apartment and with an uneasy sense that someone was out there waiting, I went to bed. I didn't sleep well. About three o'clock Pank came whimpering to bed and crawled upon the foot. Such was my state of mind that I was almost grateful for her presence.

Next morning dawned foggy, one of the dark days I detested. I awoke later than usual to a situation unimproved. Jimmy must have been detained. Norah was still gone and a desolate and cheerless kitchen, with dirty dishes stacked in the sink, awaited me. A cold shower revived me somewhat and when Jimmy telephoned about eleven o'clock I felt much better.

"Say, Aunt Mel," he asked abruptly, "have you seen Dennis?"

"Dennis? Why, no." I had forgotten entirely the freckle-faced seventeen-year-old elevator boy.

"Is he here this morning?"

"Wait. I'll see."

But the elevator was not running and no one had seen Dennis.

I went back to report to Jimmy, who seemed concerned. "Well," he said, "if you see him, Aunt Mel, let me get in a word with him first."

I promised and remembered what I wanted him to tell me. "Jimmy, have you got that glove?"

There was no answer, and I was forced to believe that he had rung off.

The day wore on slowly. Lunchtime came and still no Norah, so I had a lonely cup of tea and opened some canned soup that I found on the pantry shelf. I was beginning to be alarmed over Norah's continued absence when Edith called from Field's. She had read the morning papers and was horrified to see my name in connection with a murder. However she poo-poohed my apprehension about Norah and insisted that I meet her in an hour to help choose a gift.

The fog had not lifted, so I took the train downtown. We spent the whole afternoon shopping—after I had satisfied Edith's curiosity about the night before—and wound up with tea and a movie. Edith was in gay spirits and refused to be much concerned over the murder. She thought the corpse had probably been brought in from some car—murdered perhaps miles away.

"That's what the papers say," she added airily and I recognized Jimmy's fine hand.

Yet she was right—it couldn't have been done in the apartment house. Who among those three families living there year after year together, respectable, dignified, wealthy with the exception of Edith and me—who among us?

As to servants, there were only

the two maids for the McReynolds, often gone during Mr. McReynolds' frequent absences, Marie and Katie for the Townsends—and Marie had told me they were all four out all afternoon—and Norah, Perkins and Dennis.

"How long had he been dead when you found him?" asked Edith idly.

I started. I had not thought of that. I remembered too distinctly the feel of his face, the position and sodden limpness of his body. "Not more than fifteen minutes," I said thoughtfully.

Edith stared at me. "Are you certain, Mel?"

"Positive. I could scarcely be mistaken. His face was cool, sweaty and damp—but it didn't have the hard pasty-slick feel that it has after *rigor mortis* sets in. He—"

"Oh, Mel—*spare* me!" interrupted Edith shuddering. "Let's go home. If Norah isn't there yet we'll dine at the Arms."

III

I couldn't restrain a shiver as we entered the lobby. I looked for Dennis but Perkins said he had not appeared that day.

"Where were you last night when it happened?" I asked.

"Eating dinner, Miss Standish," he said. "I guess Dennis is sick. Please use the stairs."

"Why? Can't you run the elevator, Perkins? I could do it myself," said Edith impatiently.

"Certainly I can, Miss Coombe, but they said to leave it closed today, no one is to use it. Them detectives is smart."

So we went meekly up the one flight of stairs. A light and the smell of dinner greeted us. Norah was back. Her answers to my questions were evasive and the more I inquired into her absence the more sullen she became. Finally I desisted. Norah has always held the upper hand. Anyway, she had prepared a most delicious *entrée*.

While we were eating Jimmy telephoned. "Have you seen the evening papers?" he asked.

When I said no he continued, "Well, don't pay any attention to them. And Aunt Mel, if they try to get you to say anything, don't."

"All right—but Jimmy—"

"Did Maralie stay with you last night?"

"No. I didn't ask her."

"Oh! Well—good night." And that was all.

"Busy boy, Jimmy," said Edith when I had related the brief conversation. "Go out and get the evening papers, Norah, will you please? We must see what it's all about."

Norah must have gone to the cigar store directly below our apartment, for she was back in three minutes, drops of moisture in her hair from running across from the apartment-house entrance to the store door. Her arms full of newspapers. She was panting, her face a gray white.

"Chinymen," she gasped, dropping the heap on the table. "Miss

Mel, I'm leaving tonight. They say it's right near here."

"Nonsense," said I, seizing a paper. "What do you mean?"

But the headlines glaring at us startled me also.

TONG WAR BREAKS OUT
ON NORTH SIDE
TONG LEADER FOUND MURDERED

To my utter astonishment there followed a detailed and peculiarly revolting account of what came to be known as the "Violin Murder."

"Good heavens, Mel!" Edith was concerned enough now. "I had no idea—" She broke off to go on reading. I could feel Norah's belabored breathing over my shoulder.

"Oh, Miss Mel! Was it the murder last night?"

"Yes. Here, take this one." Norah grasped the newspaper and with much agitated rustling began a slow perusal of the columns.

Edith had scanned the story and was surveying me anxiously. "Was he Chinese-looking?" she demanded.

"I don't know. His face was so swollen and distorted." Then I thought of the hands I had stepped upon. "His hands—yes, he may have been. They were small but with long slender yellow fingers."

Edith shivered. "I didn't realize how dreadful it was. Right here in this building!"

"I forgot to tell you, Miss Mel," said Norah. "Four gentlemen called for you this afternoon. I told them you were out. Reporters, they said they was."

"Together or singly?" inquired Edith flippantly. "Mel, Mel, I'd never have believed it of you."

"Don't make jokes, Miss Edith, when a Chinyman was choked with catgut right under this roof last night," said Norah tartly, starting to clear off the table.

With an amused glance at me Edith subsided. "It doesn't say that anyone under this roof was the murderer, Norah, so you needn't be alarmed. All this is only surmise anyway. They can't prove anything."

"Wait till they question all of us," Edith hinted blandly. "Have you an alibi, Norah?"

To my surprise Norah quailed visibly! The cups in her hands rattled perilously together, and she turned a frightened face toward me.

"Miss Edith is only teasing," I reassured her—not too sincerely.

That night was almost as uncomfortable as the evening before. The heavy fog had not lifted. Indeed that whole week the weather continued wet and foggy with occasional sleet and wind. Norah went to bed with a toothache almost immediately after dinner and took all the newspapers with her.

Edith and I talked awhile but we were in poor spirits. In sheer desperation we tried to play cribbage, though we both disliked the game. Hence it wasn't much of a success and when Pank jumped in my lap, upsetting all the little pegs, we gave it up.

One peg rolled away under the

radiator, Pank in high glee after it. Somehow she pushed it under the rug and I went to rescue it. Kneeling down I reached under the radiator. Something smooth and cold met my hand and I drew out, of all things, a shining silver cigarette case.

"What on earth?" Edith took it from me, turning it over and looking curiously at its engraving. "Look, here are the initials F. L. Then it can't be Jimmy's."

I rose and dusted my skirt, forgetting the cribbage peg. Edith opened the case. "Here's some paper—with something on it. I can't —look, Mel!"

It was a small strip of paper, soiled and ragged, and on it were some black sprawly marks.

"Chinese!" cried Edith. "I'm sure of it, Mel. It looks exactly like the laundry tags. It must be a message of some sort."

We scrutinized the dirty scrap of paper eagerly but it told us nothing. And we could come to no logical explanation of its presence under our library radiator. Gradually it began to take on a highly sinister aspect.

The man who was murdered was Chinese, the headlines were full of the tong war and now this cigarette case with a message written in Chinese. I told Edith about the glove and its disappearance.

"It must have been Jimmy or Marie or Mr. Townsend," she agreed. "That was very queer, the laundry being so mixed. I wonder what article it was, Mr. Townsend lost?"

"I don't know," I said slowly. "Do you know, Edith, I'm inclined to think he hadn't lost anything."

Edith's eyes widened. "You mean there was some other reason why he wanted the laundry?"

"Or he wanted to get in our apartment. I didn't tell you before but I found one of the French doors unlocked and I locked them when Jimmy left."

"Mel, do you think—"

"I don't know what to think." Soberly I took the cigarette case, placed it in a drawer of the tall secretary and locked the drawer. Edith, according to custom, turned away while I hid the key.

Edith has been known to walk in her sleep, once indeed getting as far as the park entrance in her—but that's another story. Anyway we have to guard the keys and Edith!

The rest of the evening dragged wearily. Pank was restless, going from one place to another, settling into a nap only to start up, stare in an unpleasant way at the shadowy corners and windows, then move uneasily to some other spot. Once she stood up suddenly, her ears erect, dropped with a thud from the top of a bookcase and with body and bushy orange tail close to the ground ran stealthily into the hall. I followed to find her at the heavy door leading from our suite of rooms to the outside hall. She was sniffing anxiously under it and would not leave.

"They say Persian cats always

know when a stranger is near," said Edith from the library doorway.

Ashamed to find my nerves unaccountably shaken I replied brusquely to the effect that some people's imaginations were too active, and returned to my magazine with an air of indifference.

"Possibly," said Edith, "but I've seen my aunt's cat sit for hours outside the guest room if a stranger were sleeping there."

"Nonsense! I'm going to bed."

"I, too—after I see how Norah's toothache is. Though I feel too fidgety to do much sleeping."

The toothache was worse and Norah very savage, so we did not tarry. I advised clove oil, and Edith salvaged a crumpled newspaper and read it again while I saw to the doors and windows. I tried the French doors carefully—and unostentatiously—and later I saw Edith doing the same thing. They were securely locked.

I was too uneasy to sleep but lay quietly so as not to disturb Edith in the adjoining room. I need not have taken such care, however, for about midnight Edith called softly, "Mel—are you awake?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Nothing—I thought I heard something. The wind, I guess." But in a few minutes she got up and came to my door. "By the way," she said. "Did you notice in the papers the murdered man's name? It was Fiy Leu—F. L."

"F. L." I repeated slowly and after a pause Edith went back to bed.

IV

The next day was another bad one, cold and wet. Edith sent Norah out for the morning papers and it was with quickened interest that we read them.

The tong war was dismissed as a mere rumor, the murder was indicated as only an ordinary hold-up and it was explained that the victim could not have been Fiy Leu.

"Rather contradictory," said Edith. "Are they telling the truth this morning—or last night?"

I shook my head, thoroughly befogged. "I can't understand. But I believe they were nearer the truth last night."

The telephone interrupted us. It was Jimmy, calling to ask if I had heard anything yet of Dennis.

"Jimmy," I said, "what is this story in the papers this morning—denying everything they had last night? We don't understand."

"I do." Jimmy's reply was grim.

"What does it mean?"

"Tell you some time—when I know for a certainty."

Without another word about that he went on to say that the coroner's inquest was to be held that day and that I would have to be a witness. I was utterly dismayed at such a prospect and determined not to go. However at nine o'clock an official message arrived and Jimmy and Edith between them succeeded in convincing me I couldn't help myself.

Edith went downtown with me and Jimmy met us at the door of

the courtroom, drawing me aside to tell me that it would not be any more disagreeable than necessary—a rather ambiguous statement—and that there would be little publicity.

"And Auntie," he said in a low tone, eyes going carelessly toward the group at the door, "don't mention the glove."

He was gone before I could question him and I followed Edith into the small room feeling decidedly confused.

I suppose that shabby little room will always remain in my memory, with its dusty, carpeted floor, straight pine chairs and bleary uncurtained windows, one of them open and letting in swirls of fog and smoke. The coroner, a mealy-mouthed man whose record was none too good, was seated behind a tall desk.

We had no more than settled ourselves near the one open window, when there was a commotion at the door and I looked across to see Maralie McReynolds entering, followed by several young fellows I judged correctly to be reporters. Here was meat for their jaded pencils—beauty at a murder inquest.

However Jimmy emerged from the group and bowed to Maralie. She smiled and spoke and allowed him to lead her to a seat near us. He remained with her a few moments and I was surprised to note the intimate air of their conversation.

Jimmy was sober and very intent and once I saw Maralie's small hand placed in a sudden gesture on his arm. She seemed to be explaining something and Jimmy listened, eyes never leaving Maralie's face. Evidently her words, whatever they were, satisfied him—for he smiled suddenly and shrugged, then helped her carefully out of her heavy squirrel coat.

All at once, however, he frowned and questioned her again. This time her answer must not have pleased him, for though he talked along with her for a few minutes longer a worried frown remained in his eyes. As he rose Maralie turned and saw me—and immediately came to take the seat next to mine—thus depriving Edith of a chance to speculate on the surprising fact of their acquaintance. Jimmy had never mentioned Maralie—and Maralie, living on the floor above us and running in and out of our place, had never spoken of Jimmy in even the most casual way.

I had attended very few coroner's inquests in my life and knew little of them but even so it struck me that this inquest was singularly brief. O'Brand was the first witness and a very noncommittal one. He wasn't sure what time it was when he had been summoned, thought it around seven thirty or eight.

"Who summoned you?" asked the coroner.

"A woman—I don't know her name."

"Do you see her in the room?"

O'Brand fastened his eyes upon me. "Yes."

The coroner nodded. "Tell us what you did when you found

the body of the deceased victim."

"Ascertained that he was dead—then called Headquarters."

Again the coroner nodded. "Describe the position and appearance of the body."

O'Brand did so—deliberately, fumbling for a word now and then.

"From what you know of such matters how long would you say he had been dead?"

"Several hours," he said. "He was cold and stiff."

At this Edith glanced at me and raised one eyebrow.

"Were there signs of a struggle?"

"No, sir. He looked as if he had been placed there by someone. All doubled up like that, sir."

"Did you see any indications of an assailant?"

"None."

O'Brand was dismissed and Dr. Bascom, who had accompanied the policemen to the scene and examined the dead man, was asked to testify. I had never heard of Dr. Bascom before and while I was not favorably impressed with him I was open to conviction.

"How was the dead man killed?" inquired the coroner after the first few questions.

"Strangled."

"By what means?"

"Seemingly by a violin string."

"This one?"

The doctor identified the sinister slender coil perfunctorily, by what mark I could not see. I felt Maralie stir beside me and turned to see her leaning forward, her eyes wide. The coroner left the question of the violin string and hurried on. Dr. Bascom testified as to the position and appearance of the dead man, his words coinciding in every particular with those of O'Brand.

Midway he hesitated and after a second continued, "From his crumpled position and general appearance I would judge that he had been placed in the elevator after death."

The coroner ran his eyes over the papers on his desk. "How long had the murdered man been dead when you saw him?"

"Three hours, at least," said Dr. Bascom promptly.

"You make that as a positive statement, based on your professional knowledge of such matters?"

"I do."

Edith and I exchanged swift glances.

"Miss Melvina Standish." I rose, the "Melvina" stirring, as always, a decided irritation within me. I took the oath somewhat snappishly. We Standishes always tell the truth under all circumstances.

The questions that followed were not calculated to soothe my feelings—many could not possibly have had any bearing on the case.

"Where had you been, previous to finding the body?"

"At Orchestra Hall, attending a symphony concert."

"Alone or with a party?"

"Alone."

"Where did you sit?"

For years I've had the same seat, finding it from habit. I could not for the life of me think of the exact number and row. "I don't know."

"You don't know?" repeated the coroner.

"Toward the back on the orchestra—at the north."

"But you can't tell more definitely?"

"No!" I said flatly.

"Did you see anyone you know at the concert—anyone who spoke to you and would remember you?"

"Certainly."

"Who?"

I paused. Who, indeed? I could not think of a single soul. "I don't just remember. Doubtless I can think of someone."

"Doubtless," agreed the coroner with a peculiar smile and I saw grins on the faces of all the reporters save Jimmy, who scowled.

"Where were you between five o'clock and the time you found the murdered man?" Did I imagine it or did he stress, ever so lightly, the word "found."

"At the Copper Kettle Tearoom —and driving home."

"What time did you leave this tearoom?"

"Six o'clock."

"I suppose you met a number of acquaintances at the tearoom," suggested the coroner nastily.

"*No!*" I snapped and again the reporters grinned.

"You say you discovered the murdered man?"

"I suppose so. No one else was around. Dennis, the elevator boy, was gone somewhere though it was only quarter of seven and he—"

"Just a moment, Miss Standish," interrupted the coroner. "Kindly answer the question asked."

"Don't you want to know what I have to tell?" I said impatiently. "Another thing"—I was determined to speak—"that man had not been dead longer than fifteen minutes."

The coroner half rose in his chair and rapped on the desk vigorously with his gavel. "Miss Standish—*Miss Standish!*"

"Not fifteen minutes," I repeated. "And I'm a nurse." I raised my voice to carry above the confused stir and buzz that arose and the now-frenzied sound of the coroner's gavel. "I'm a nurse and I know he hadn't been dead any three hours!"

Someone shook my arm and Jimmy's voice whispered, "Hush, Aunt Mel. It won't do any good."

I looked at the coroner, expecting to be reproved or fined or something, but he subsided into his chair and mopped his forehead with a rather grimy handkerchief. Edith's chin was buried in her big fur collar but there was suspicious levity in her eyes. Maralie, however, was sitting upright, her face chalk-white in the murky little room.

Without another question the coroner dismissed me and called a policeman, one of those who had answered O'Brand's call to the station. He added nothing to the small store of information. After his testimony, however, an odd thing occurred.

"Miss Maralie McReynolds," called the coroner, consulting a slip of paper.

As Maralie rose and walked to the front someone handed the coroner a note. He opened, scanned it, then placed it in an inside pocket. Then he turned to his list again.

"Oh — er — Miss McReynolds, there seems to have been a mistake." He paused for a moment. "You need not testify, Miss McReynolds." Cognizant of Maralie's pretty young face he beamed fishily down at her.

With a cool nod Maralie turned to leave. At the door she gave me a brief smile, then was gone.

An attempt to establish the identity of the dead man followed. Or rather, as I remarked later to Edith, it was an attempt not to establish his identity. The newspaper rumors were referred to slightingly by the coroner. Several people, presumably acquainted with the Fiy Leu of tong-war fame, swore that the corpse was not that of the notorious Chinese.

Then the coroner pointed out that there were no valuables about his person, that holdups and murders were unfortunately too common and that he had been dead at least three hours—this last with a curious glance at me—according to indisputable evidence of the well-known Dr. J. C. Bascom.

The jury rendered a verdict and the inquest was over. The dead man —whoever he was—had come to his death at the hands of a "person or persons unknown."

Disgustedly I gathered my coat about me and followed by Edith left the room, evading with determination a cluster of reporters.

"Your yesterday's callers?" asked Edith.

Jimmy lingered at the desk but we went directly home. I was considerably put out over the inquest and considering the way I had been silenced I think my irritation was just. As we approached the apartment house Shive Townsend's car passed us and I'm sure I saw Maralie with him. Edith said it couldn't be she, that Maralie wouldn't go out with Shive Townsend—but I was positive it was Maralie for I recognized the small-brimmed bright-colored hat she had worn.

We were still discussing it as we unlocked our door but when we entered the hall I heard a soft little thud that was all too familiar. I stepped to the living-room door. Sure enough, there was Pank, strolling across the floor with a deliberate and affected nonchalance that bespoke her guilt.

"She might as well put up a flag," chuckled Edith. "Where was it this time, the bed or the dining-room table?"

"Neither," I leaned over to catch the highlights on the surface of the polished mahogany desk. "She was up here. Look!" Laughing, Edith bent also to see the tiny four-toed footprints that showed so plainly. Suddenly the smile froze on her lips and she clutched my arm.

"Mel—do you see what I see?"

I did. There at one end of the desk, clearly visible from our angle of vision, was the print of a hand! The regular outline of a palm, fingers amazingly clear, with all the

intricate whorls and traceries of the flesh, and the thumb a bit smudged.

"Norah?" suggested Edith.

"Norah! Her hands are like hams. That print looks like a child's."

Edith stripped off her glove and carefully placed her bare right hand not on but just above the mark. "Heavens! My hand is twice as big!"

"Of course the print would be somewhat smaller than the hand that made it," I mused. "But still . . ." I glanced at my own hands and shook my head.

V

Just then Norah came in. Her tooth must have got worse for she looked pale and unhappy.

"When did you last dust the desk, Norah?" asked Edith.

"This morning—you know I always dust in the morning, Miss Edith." Norah's voice was reproachful.

"Have you been out this morning?" I asked.

"Only to market." Norah looked at us suspiciously. We seldom bother with details of housekeeping, Norah being opposed to interference.

"Miss Mel," she continued, "I came in to ask you about the laundry. There's been a nasty Chinyman hanging around here all morning. He says they made a mistake about ours and wants me to give it to him. I've got it all put away and I know everything I put away was ours."

"Of course the pieces belong to us. I looked at every bit of the laundry, Norah, and I know it's all right. If he comes again send him about his business."

"He's out there now."

"He is? Tell him there's nothing here but what belongs to us. The very idea!"

"I did tell him that but he's settin' out there on the porch at the back."

Norah, the unconquered—baffled! I stared for a second and then, ignoring Edith's giggle, strode to the back door. I opened it a scant few inches and peered through. A small yellowish man, his face unpleasantly pitted with smallpox, was standing on the porch.

The tails of his shirt flapped dismally on the outside of his black sateen trousers, wrapped Chinese-fashion at the waist. He had a black skull-cap on his close-shaven head and cold ankles and heels protruded from the flat heelless sandals. He must have come from the laundry around the corner. He couldn't have been out long in such garb in that raw penetrating fog.

"Missee give launlee."

"No—the laundry is mine."

"Mistake — not yours. Missee give." He smiled.

"No, it's mine." I repeated firmly.

"Wrong—mistake. Missee give." He sidled up to me and thrust his face into mine. "Missee give—I call p'lice." He grinned again and his black slanted eyes gleamed wickedly. For an instant I drew back. Then his insolence angered me.

I flung open the door, seized the first implement that came to my hands, a dust mop, and shook it furiously in his face. He backed precipitately, comic surprise on his ugly features.

"Don't talk to me of police! If you come here again . . ." He fled down the steps and into the areaway and I leaned over the porch railing, regardless of possible observing eyes, and went on, "*I'll* call the police."

He was running now and I stood there, watching his figure disappear into the fog, listening to the shuffling slap slap of his sandaled feet.

All at once I recalled that sometime, somewhere, I had had that same experience—of a shapeless figure dwindling away in the dusk with the muffled sound of slapping feet.

It was the night of the murder. I was standing at the door of the garage. I had seen a figure vanish into the gray darkness and had heard the peculiar slapping sound. Only a loose sandal could make such a sound.

When I told Edith about it her amusement—for Edith-fashion she had watched the whole episode from the dining-room window—vanished.

"See here, Mel," she said, "this convinces me. Somehow we—or you—are mixed up in this murder business. There's something in the apartment that somebody wants."

I said, "The only thing I can think of is the cigarette case. Let's look at it again."

If it had belonged to the murdered man, if he were "F. L." or Fiy Leu, if that message inside of it—so many ifs. Together we examined the case and the dirty scrap of paper but to no avail.

"If we only knew how it came here," said Edith, "and what that slip of paper means." Suddenly her eyes brightened. "I'll tell you, Mel, let's take the paper, whatever it is, and keep it, and leave the empty case here—or no, on this table by the door. We can watch—"

"To see if anyone takes it?"

"To see *who* takes it," corrected Edith and added sagely, "Somebody wants that case and wants it badly and if we know who wants it—"

"Luncheon is served," came a subdued voice from the door—and I might say here that to the dust mop episode I attribute my growing ascendancy over Norah.

We stayed home that afternoon and did little but talk over the strangely incomplete inquest.

About five o'clock Maralie came in. She looked worried and said her father had gone to New York on business and might she come down and sleep in our guest room.

"He didn't say good-by or anything," she said. "I just found a message when I got home this noon. I've been sitting up there alone this afternoon . . ." Her voice trailed into silence and she shivered.

With a feeling of unreasonable resentment toward Maralie's grim silent father I rang the bell. "Bring tea, Norah—with cinnamon toast and those chocolate éclairs."

Maralie brightened up somewhat. "I love éclairs." She eyed Norah

hungrily. "Do they have cherries on them, Norah?"

Norah did not reply and I glanced at her idly. Edith was fooling with the fire log in the fireplace and Maralie turned watching the flames leap up—so they did not see Norah's frightened eyes fastened on the gleam of silver on the table. But I saw and knew, knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that Norah had seen that cigarette case before.

I'll watch her, I thought as Norah tore her eyes away from the trinket, and if she takes it she'll have to explain to me.

I was always grateful for the hour that followed—it was one bright spot in those dreadful weary days, days that brought gloom and fear, and evil and dark suspicions. Edith was at her wittiest. Maralie's gay laughter and sweet voice paused only to satisfy her robust and youthful appetite.

Through the chatter I kept a wary eye on the cigarette case. If Norah took it I wanted to catch her in the act.

"Did you bring down your violin?" asked Edith during a pause.

Maralie's short curls bobbed up and down. "And my pearls," she confessed, flushing a little. "Mother gave me those, you know, and I prize them above everything."

"You were wise to bring them with you," I said to cover the tremble in her voice. "Thieves and prowlers are too common."

"Play for us a little, won't you, Maralie?" Edith rose and walked over to the piano, a lovely Brambach grand that had kept us poor for a year but which we adore as people always adore tyrants. "Here is that Liszt Rhapsody Mel likes so much." Edith sat down and ran her fingers over the keys.

Maralie hesitated, though she was usually more than willing to please us, and I saw her hand close convulsively.

"I can't tonight. I—I have no—"

A vigorous peal of the doorbell interrupted her and I was dumfounded to see Norah ushering in young Shive Townsend.

"How do you do, Miss Standish," he said smoothly. "I stopped for Maralie. She's dining with me tonight."

For once in my life words deserted me and Edith seemed equally stricken. *Maralie* dining with Shive Townsend! And yet as Edith pointed out when they had gone, Maralie suddenly silent and pale and Shive's puffy, swarthy face openly gloating, we had actually nothing against him.

"I don't like him," I said. "His eyes make me think of a fish. Maralie is so young and lovely—"

"Credit her with good sense also," said Edith tartly and we lapsed into an uncomfortable silence, Edith ruffling Pank's tail the wrong way and I staring moodily at Maralie's violin case.

After dinner Jimmy came. He looked very tired but accepted with enthusiasm some leftover dessert and coffee. Edith made the coffee, initiating a new and vastly compli-

cated machine presented her by some admirer, and we sat in the library enjoying it. For some reason or other Jimmy was not up to his usual form.

"Well," Edith said presently, "what did you think of the inquest?"

"What did I think of it?" Jimmy scowled. "Damned foolishness."

Edith and I looked at each other. "It seemed very brief," said Edith.

"And totally inconclusive," I added.

Jimmy hesitated and then, as if making a clean breast of it, he blurted, "All cut and dried, every word rehearsed—except yours, Auntie Mel." He grinned, then quickly sobered, leaning forward intently. "Are you sure he had been dead less than three hours?"

"As sure as that I'm sitting here," I said positively. "I've seen death too many times to be mistaken. That doctor was either a fool—or a liar."

Jimmy assented rather absentmindedly, seemingly deep in thought.

"Jimmy, didn't you say there were initials on the dead man's collar?"

"Yes but don't tell it to anyone."

"Were they F. L.?" asked Edith breathlessly.

Jimmy paused for an instant. "Yes—F. L." He surveyed us with narrowed eyes.

"Let's show it to him, Mel," said Edith.

"Show what?"

I turned to the table where our trap had been prepared. "It's gone!"

"Who took it?"

"I don't know," I confessed weakly. "I was so surprised when Shive Townsend came in that I forgot to watch it."

"What are you women talking about? What's gone?" asked Jimmy rudely.

"The F. L.—I mean the cigarette case."

"We—tell him about it, Mel."

Rather reluctantly I did so, ashamed of the failure of our plan. Jimmy listened earnestly with an anxious pucker between his eyes. When I finished he didn't say anything for a few moments.

"It's either Norah or Maralie," said Edith.

"Or Shive Townsend," said Jimmy abruptly. "So he took her out to dinner?"

"I'm positive she didn't want to go," I hastened to say. "She didn't look at all happy, did she, Edith?"

"Happy? About as happy as a clam," said Edith, her eyes on Jimmy's worried young face. "Why, she wouldn't even play her violin for us, and she always does that. She said—" Edith broke off suddenly, her gaze meeting mine in consternation. "Oh, Mel . . ."

The same thought struck us both and I remembered Maralie's frightened look when the coroner had held up the coiled violin string. I rose.

"It isn't fair to Maralie. We must prove ourselves wrong." I crossed the room and, unheeding Edith's startled exclamation, opened the violin case.

The E-string was gone. Though I searched the pockets of the case

I did not find an E-string. The other three strings were on the violin but there were no extras.

There was a strange stillness in the room. Then Edith spoke. "Coincidence!"

"Coincidence," I echoed.

"Mere coincidence." There was defiance in Jimmy's voice.

Guiltily I replaced the violin and closed the case.

"With that string, what string was used in — for . . ." Edith floundered helplessly but Jimmy understood.

"With an E-string," he answered miserably and sank into a chair, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands.

VI

I choked suddenly and Edith walked over to the window. In a moment she turned. "Aren't you the two big dumbbells? There are probably millions of E-strings and they break every day and are thrown away—and just because one that Maralie was using snapped and she hasn't happened to replace it . . ."

"Of course it's absurd, Edith." And indeed it seemed absurd to attach any significance to what we had just found. "Listen to Edith, Jimmy. We're nervous and overstrung and ready to worry about anything."

Jimmy straightened up, but his face did not brighten. "You don't understand," he said. "You see, I don't know where she was. I saw her enter the building—and I wanted to see her and followed her in. I didn't come to see you, Aunt Mel. It was to see Maralie. So I ran up the stairs, thinking to meet her at the elevator door on the next floor. But she didn't get out of the elevator when it stopped. And this Chinaman came—looked all around.

"He didn't see me. I stepped back around the landing when I saw him. Maralie didn't come out. Then he went back into the elevator. The elevator stopped for a moment, went up to the third. I rang and rang and even knocked at the McReynolds' but no one came."

"And then you came down the stairs?"

"Well"—Jimmy hesitated—"not right away, Aunt Mel."

Evidently he had told as much and probably more than he intended. A vague foreboding in the back of my mind was stilled. If Jimmy were afraid that Maralie had some connection with the murder he could have had nothing to do with it himself.

"How long have you known her, Jimmy?" I asked gently.

"Not very long." Jimmy picked up his hat and coat before he added. "I—Aunt Mel, you understand—there isn't a chance in the world for me."

"I'd like to know why not!" said I.

"Don't!" Jimmy spoke abruptly, then patted my hand. "Never mind!"

At the door he stopped, however, and reverted to the puzzle. "He

was Fiy Leu. One of the fellows recognized him—but it's to be kept quiet."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "I don't know but I may some time. We've got to find that elevator boy first. Oh, yes! Let me have the paper that was in the cigarette case. And be sure you lock the doors and windows of your apartment at night."

"Well!" said Edith reflectively as I returned to the fireplace and sank into a chair.

"I might have guessed it." I felt tired and hurt that Jimmy had not told us of Maralie sooner.

"There's evidently a rival—and a successful one," said Edith after a ruminative pause.

"*Edith!*" I turned to her as the thought came to me. "You don't suppose it could be Shive Townsend!"

"Good heavens, Mel, Maralie couldn't think anything of him!"

"We don't know a thing about it," I said gloomily.

"There's the money side of it, though." Edith hesitated and then continued unwillingly: "Townsend must have a lot of money—but so far as we know so has Maralie's father—plenty for her needs."

"It couldn't be that. I don't know what to think."

"And that E-string," said Edith. "It couldn't have been anything but an accident. I mean—"

"I know what you mean. It's utterly absurd to think of Maralie having anything to do with the murder."

"As to the glove," continued Edith, guessing my thoughts with unerring accuracy, "probably it *is* her glove but that doesn't indicate anything."

"Of course not," I said fervently.

Another thoughtful silence followed.

"I'm going to find Denny," I said at last.

Edith nodded.

"And find out what Norah knows," I went on. "Maybe that will give us something to start with. Somehow Jimmy and Maralie are involved and I'm going to straighten out this tangle. And anyway," I said indignantly, "that inquest was a farce and I'd like to know what's back of it."

We waited to let Maralie in when she arrived about eleven o'clock. She was tired and pale and we talked very little, going to bed almost immediately after her arrival. I didn't go to sleep right away. About one o'clock I became conscious of a tiny repeated wail in the distance and I remembered that I hadn't shut Pank in the back of the house as is our custom at night.

I wrapped my long purple dressing gown about me and slipped quietly out into the living room. "Pank, Pank," I called softly.

She did not appear but the wailing continued with renewed energy and volume.

"Kitty," I called again. She seemed to be in the hall. No—but I could hear her demands more clearly. Evidently she was outside! She must have slipped out while Jimmy was

standing in the door and, having had a glorious and unhampered snooping spree, was returning home.

Cautiously, so as not to arouse anyone, not even turning on the light, I took the chain off the door and opened it a few inches. With a satisfied grunt Pank started in and then, in the exasperating way of cats, sat down exactly on the doorsill to scratch her ear. Wrathfully I stooped to yank her inside, when I heard something that made me forget the cat and literally freeze in my tracks.

". . . can't help it—I simply haven't got it," said a low guarded voice somewhere in the blackness of the outside hall. A curiously choppy murmur seemed to reply and then the first voice came again, raised a bit as if in anger. "But I tell you I didn't. It's your own fault. Why didn't *you* get it? You had more chance than I."

"S-sh," interrupted the other voice but the first one went on, "How *could* I get it? Both those old maids watching me. As to the money you know yourself—"

"S-sh!" Again came the interruption and this time it prevailed, for I heard only a few snatches. "Can't get it—haven't any—you—dirty deal—publicity."

There was a soft rustle on the heavy carpet—they were moving nearer my door. I glanced breathlessly over my shoulder. No, I had not turned on any lights. They—whoever they were—could not possibly see me. If they would cross the lighted area of the elevator shaft, maybe—a slim maybe—I could see them.

Slowly the murmur came nearer. Then I saw shadows cross the grilled door and two figures. One, the smaller, turned and the faint light shone full square on his face. It was a Chinese—and as I looked I recognized the pock-pitted face, the close beady eyes, the tight black skullcap. It was the man who had demanded the laundry that very afternoon.

I did not succeed in seeing the other man. Only his bulky shadow loomed before the door. But there was a haunting familiarity about his voice. I was certain that I had heard it before; but I could not remember how or when. Low, oily, smooth—where was it that I had heard those tones? That voice was Shive Townsend's—I was almost sure of it.

All at once, as if they had reached an agreement, they separated—the Chinese going down the stairs, the shadow of the other vanishing suddenly.

With an uneasy feeling that he might be still lurking in the hall, I drew back, holding my breath and afraid that my thumping heartbeats would betray me, cautiously closed the door, holding my fingers in the latch and then easing it to very gently.

Despite my care, however, the lock gave a sudden loud rasp and I listened. I heard nothing but as I crept down our own hall and to bed I had eerie conviction that the man in the hall had heard and was pos-

sibly at that moment prowling outside the hall or listening at our door.

* * * * *

Early the next morning I instituted my search for Dennis. A freckly-faced elevator boy, seventeen years old and unbelievably stocky and husky-looking, cannot vanish off the face of earth without leaving some trace.

Perkins, the doorman, was my first stage of inquiry. He had been running the elevator since the coroner's ban was removed, and I thought he might know something from the landlord. There was another man in the lobby at the time —a small man with a dirty-looking skin and a queerly shaped head, flat on top with a short forehead and no chin. He lingered near, fumbling through his pockets for a match, and I remember noticing the yellow-green whites of his eyes and wondering if he knew that he had a bad liver.

Perkins, a little to my disappointment, knew nothing of Dennis's whereabouts or why he had disappeared so precipitately. "My only orders from the boss," said Perkins, "was to tend the door and run the elevator."

I had him call me a taxi and started for the office of the man who owns the building. It was a long journey, down into the Loop—and when I had arrived and sat for forty-eight minutes in an anteroom an office girl finally brought me a message that Mr. Cross was out.

"When will he be back?"

"I don't know. You can see Mr. Lansey, his secretary."

Mr. Lansey turned out to be a youngish fellow with blond hair. He didn't know a thing about the elevator boy, indeed he doubted if Mr. Cross did, explaining to me carefully that owning these properties and taking the rent was a mere sideline with Mr. Cross. I resisted an impulse to remark that in that case why make such a point of collecting the rents—for they are exorbitant—and asked if he could find the addresses of Mr. Cross's employees.

I felt a little exultant thrill as I copied Dennis's address and started away. At least I had succeeded thus far. The address was strange to me but the taxi driver seemed to recognize it. He looked at me curiously when I gave it and after a moment's hesitation said, "Well, all right," in a not very respectful way.

Indeed the neighborhood was rather appalling. Secretive old houses, their curtains and shades pulled close—long dilapidated flat buildings, small drab shanties, cottages built flush with the narrow ill-paved streets. The occasional street lights did not relieve the dreary aspect.

The taxi finally stopped at one of the cottages. "I think this is the place, ma'am," the driver said.

The exterior of the cottage was not prepossessing in appearance, but I pulled myself together resolutely. "Wait," I said.

"Er—madam"—the man spoke with diffidence—"do you know

just where it is you're going?"

"Certainly." I showed him the address.

"Oh—well." He shrugged. "This isn't a very good neighborhood, ma'am. We have orders not to come here after nine o'clock at night."

His words, plus the generally sordid atmosphere, sent a little shiver up my back. However, I am a woman of determination.

"Wait," I said and with shoulders and head erect advanced to the door and knocked vigorously.

A boy about seven years old came to the door—red hair and freckles like Dennis's. To all my questions he merely shook his head. I said I would come in and wait till his mother returned. He stood aside grudgingly and I entered.

The inside of the cottage surprised me. Shabby but clean and very neat, it was far from what I had expected. The boy eyed me doubtfully as I sat down in a rocker near the door and prepared to wait. I had scarcely seated myself, however, when a door at the back of the room opened and a woman came in.

She was clean-looking and freshly dressed. Her eyes widened when she saw me and she hastily set down the tray she was carrying.

"Here's another one of them, ma," said the boy, speaking for the first time, "but it's a woman."

"What do you want, ma'am?" asked the woman steadily.

"I must apologize for my intrusion, especially since there is illness in the home," I said, with my eyes on the tray where reposed an egg-nog, a bottle of medicine and a spoon. "I'm trying to find Dennis Finnegan. Are you his mother?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Finnegan. "Dennis is not here."

"Not here!" I said. "Do you know where he is?"

Mrs. Finnegan shook her head firmly.

"How long has he been gone?"

She hesitated a second and then answered less certainly, "About two weeks."

"Oh." I was disappointed. "Why—that was before the murder."

Mrs. Finnegan's eyes flickered and I saw her move abruptly. But she checked the words on her tongue and merely nodded again.

"Mrs. Finnegan," I said earnestly, "I'm very anxious to find Dennis, not to hurt him but to help someone else. Can't you help me?"

"He's not here," she said stubbornly.

I paused. I was convinced that she knew something of his whereabouts. I must find him, believing as I did that he could give us the first clue. My quandary solved itself in a surprising way.

"Hey, ma," came a muffled but familiar voice from the next room, "aren't you ever gonna bring that milkshake?"

VII

Mrs. Finnegan flushed.

"Why, that's Dennis!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, he's sick." As if further denial was futile, she rose, took up the tray, and motioned me to follow. "He's here. I guess you're Miss Standish?"

"Yes."

"Well, you wouldn't get him into trouble. Them reporters has been here every day. My Dennis knows nothing of that murder. He's only a boy and got the mumps."

She was right in that. A worse case I've never seen. Inside the bandages tied around his face his eyes twinkled at me, though he spoke with circumspection owing to the soreness.

"Well, Dennis, you've given us a good deal of worry," I said.

His eyes clouded. "Leavin' like that, you mean, Miss Standish?"

"Yes—and because we wanted you to tell us"—I thought rapidly —"who came into the lobby last Wednesday night between six and seven o'clock."

"I don't know," he faltered.

"Look here, Dennis." I leaned over to look straight into his eyes. "This won't hurt you and it will help me and some other innocent people, Mr. Jimmy among them."

It was the last name that shook Dennis's resolution. He cherished a fervent adoration for Jimmy, fostered by lavish tips and occasional baseball and prize-fight tickets that had come Jimmy's way.

"If it's Mr. Jimmy . . ." His eyes sought his mother's questioningly.

"It's all right, I think, Dennis," she said. "Miss Standish won't let you suffer for it, I feel certain."

"Well, there was a man I never saw before—the man that was murdered. Then there was Miss Maralie —she went up the stairs, though. And Mr. Jimmy—he went up the stairs too. The man had come in, and I was about to take him up when he said, 'Wait a minute.' Miss Maralie was just coming in and he watched her go over to the stairs. And then Mr. Jimmy, he come in just as she started up the stairs, and the man watched him too. Then he said, 'All right—go ahead.' "

"What floor did the murdered man go to?"

"Well, he had me stop at the second and wait. He was gone but a minute or two and when he came back he said to go on up to the third. That's the Townsends. I told him the Townsends were out but he said to go ahead, anyway."

I nodded. "Did you see Miss McReynolds or Mr. Jimmy again?"

"No," said Dennis.

"Then Miss McReynolds wasn't in the elevator at all?"

"Oh no, ma'am. She was upstairs and around the turn before Mr. Jimmy came in."

"He came in just at the moment she was out of sight?"

"Yes—and he went by the stairs, too."

I sighed relievedly. That meant that Maralie had not been in the elevator with Fiy Leu. Jimmy would be glad to know this. Yet—where was she? If in the apartment she surely would have come to the door, even though—as Marie had inad-

vertently told me—both her maids were out. *She could have gone on up the stairs,* I thought and hated myself for thinking it.

"Did you see anybody else?"

"No," said Dennis. He hesitated, with another glance at his mother. "Well, yes—there was a Chinaman."

"Tell me about him."

"Well—I saw him but that was all."

"Where?"

"Oh, just walkin' around."

"On what floor?"

"F-first," said Dennis. "I guess that's all, Miss Standish."

"Yes, that's all," said Mrs. Finnegan with what I somehow felt to be a warning glance at Dennis.

I was not satisfied. I had expected more. It seemed that he would say no more that day. So with a mental reservation to the effect that I would send Jimmy in person I expressed myself as satisfied and, wishing Dennis's mumps a swift departure, I left.

The taxi-driver was noticeably relieved by my safe and sound reappearance and took my home address with an added air of alleviation. Clearly he regarded me as a hopeless eccentric.

Just as I sat down, however, I saw back of us another taxi. With memory of Mrs. Finnegan's remark about the reporters I leaned forward, scrutinizing the figure within. I could not see him then but as my driver turned around his lights fell for one glaring second upon the occupant of the other car. It was the chinless man who had listened to my conversation in the lobby that morning with Perkins.

I sat upright in the seat, my thoughts in a whirl. Who was he, and what was he doing here? Had he followed me? Was he trying to see Dennis Finnegan? All at once I relaxed, half-laughing. It was a reporter, of course. My only apprehension was lest he would talk to Dennis before Jimmy had a chance to do so.

With this in mind I had the taxi stop at a drugstore and I telephoned Jimmy, luckily finding him in. He was pleased that I had located Dennis and though I spoke in a guarded way I managed to tell him most of my conversation.

"And ask him particularly about the Chinaman," I concluded. "Oh, yes, and what time he, Dennis, left the building."

"All right," replied Jimmy. He repeated the address. "How's everything?"

But just then I saw through the glass door of the booth another taxi stop in front, carrying a single passenger. It was the same man, the reporter! I hung up, determined he should hear nothing from me, and sailed past him, head high but conscious of a peculiar interest in his eyes.

On the way home I endeavored without success to piece together what little I knew. First there was Fiy Leu, the murdered man. Why was he in our apartment? Whom had he come to see? Why was he so interested in Maralie? Why had Fiy

Leu stopped at the McReynolds' door before he went up to Townsend's?

The Townsends—father or son? I liked neither old Mr. Townsend nor Shive but I could scarcely believe them guilty of murder. Moreover Dennis had said they were both out.

Of course there was the quarrel I had heard the previous night and the vanishing cigarette case. However Shive, if it was Shive, had explained that he hadn't had a chance to get it—whatever "it" was. I suppose by the "two old maids" he meant Edith and me!

That left Maralie or Norah. The Chinese had insisted on seeing the laundry. Was that merely a ruse to get into the house? Old Mr. Townsend had got in. And this recurring Chinese—who was *he?* What was his business? Dennis had seen him but the thought struck me that Dennis was curiously evasive when I questioned him about the Chinese.

Jimmy was sure that the murdered man was Fiy Leu. That being true, possibly a war between tongs was at the bottom of the trouble. That would explain the strange Chinaman's presence on the scene. Was he the murderer? Was he the intruder I had seen through the dusk at the garage door?

Then there was Norah, her inexplicable absence, her odd and intense interest in the murder—though that might be only her natural curiosity. And Maralie and the violin string —and Jimmy and the glove.

As I entered the lobby I met the Townsends, father and son. They were both overly polite, old Mr. Townsend fairly unctuous behind his spectacles. Shining dapper little men that they were, I felt absurdly conscious of my muddy galoshes. They detained me for a moment and for the first time, and doubtless, as a result of my recent cogitations, I wondered as to their nationality. Townsend—it was a good solid English name. They were anything but Anglo-Saxon in appearance—short, dark, their fat skin oily, their narrow eyes beady.

In spite of their ultra-fashionable clothing there was more than a hint of the Chinese. I pulled myself up short—I was seeing a trace of Chinese influence in everything.

I found Edith and Maralie at lunch. Edith had matinée tickets and prevailed upon me to go along. Norah wanted an evening off, to see her sister, I think she said—so we arranged to stay in town for dinner.

I remembered that we enjoyed the matinée and dined luxuriously, for us, at the Blackstone. We felt quite festive, save for a lurking sense of anxiety. I caught Maralie looking sadly into space several times and Edith was absent-minded, ordering a French clear soup which she loathes. None of us wanted to return to the gloom that had insensibly crept into and prevaded the dark halls of the old-fashioned apartment house. So we made a day of it and went to another show. It was an unhappy drama and we came out feeling very sober, to find it pouring rain.

We tried to commandeer a taxi but it was impossible. Finally we scurried to the elevated and arrived home soaked to the skin.

We lingered only for warm showers and went to bed. It seemed to me that the rain beat unceasingly all night. Anyway, it was still raining when we breakfasted the next morning, not hard but a constant drip-drip that wore away one's nerves. Norah was unusually stolid and sullen that morning, slapping down plates vindictively and staring fixedly at me with an unfathomable look in her eyes.

Edith had caught cold in the wet of the night before and was somewhat sulky and my rheumatic knee was giving out twinges. Even Maralie had not escaped the prevailing dejection. She glanced without much interest through the papers and I saw her staring moodily from the windows out at the dismal day.

The heavy, dull hours dragged on. None of us had the heart to go to church. We talked little and once I caught Edith jotting on the margin of her book, *Ask J. about papers.* Later, on going to the kitchen, I found her questioning Norah again as to her whereabouts the day of the murder. Norah showed an unperturbed countenance, but when I asked her for wintergreen ointment for my knee she brought me castor oil!

Maralie, like a pale and restless little ghost, wandered about from one window to another and finally wrote a letter to her father, though she told us that she didn't know his address and couldn't post the letter until she heard.

Even Pank shared the gloom. Having been discovered stealing oysters she was chastised, first by Edith who loves oysters, then by Norah who despises cats. She crawled under my bed in high dudgeon, where she sulked all afternoon.

Maralie did not touch her violin case all day. I half hoped and half feared that she would. For in spite of our careful mutual reassurances the night before, a persistent little doubt kept stirring in the back of my mind—a doubt I could not put into words.

Following an immovable habit of hers, one that we have striven in vain to change, Norah had served a heavy Sunday dinner at noon with much pastry and an underdone roast. A touch of indigestion did not improve my spirits. Then too Jimmy did not arrive at his usual time, which always makes me impatient.

When at last he came in, about five o'clock, Maralie almost immediately vanished, murmuring something incoherent about having to go to her own apartment. Jimmy rose to accompany her but she wouldn't let him do so and he sat down again with a set jaw and a hurt look in his eyes that made a lump come to my throat. He looked like a hurt little boy.

"You've got wet feet," I said brusquely. "Put them there near the fire." Those drizzly days we had

a constant and expensive pine log in the fireplace.

"Don't scold me, Aunt Mel," and Jimmy obediently shoved his chair nearer the fender. "If you knew what I'd been doing! Though, to tell the truth," he said, "I haven't accomplished much."

Edith and I were all attention but Jimmy lapsed into silence and I had to set him going again.

"It's that Dennis, that I can't understand," he said finally. "I went right out there after you gave me a ring, Aunt Mel, but the little rascal wouldn't tell me a thing."

"*What!*"

"Not a thing. And what's more he denied that he had told you anything!" Jimmy glanced at me.

"The little liar!" I was so taken by surprise as to be almost inarticulate.

"Did you ask him anything I told you to ask him?"

"Anything! I asked him everything I could think of—how long Fiy Leu stayed at the Townsends, if he'd know the Chinaman again, where and how he saw him, on what floor he was, when did he come on the scene—everything!"

"And Dennis wouldn't say a word."

"Not a word. And that old woman stood over him with a face like thunder every second of the time. If it wasn't for her I think he might have talked."

"What do you suppose happened?" asked Edith. "He was all right when you were there, Mel?"

I nodded and Jimmy frowned. "I'll tell you one thing," he said gravely. "That kid is scared to death—and so is his mother."

"Scared?"

"Yes."

"But who—why?" I checked myself as the full implication came to me. "Why, Jimmy! That would mean Dennis knows something, something that—"

"Something that somebody wants to keep quiet," said Jimmy. "That's exactly it. Now the question is, what is it? And who's frightened him? Tell me every word of your talk with Dennis, Aunt Mel."

I did so, Jimmy following me carefully.

VIII

"Now tell me, Jimmy, what you were doing all that time up on the second floor. You followed Maralie up the stairs? Did she see you?"

"No-o," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "I don't think she saw me but I don't know."

"Did you see her?"

"Well—no. Not after I entered the building. Just on the street. I think—I don't know where she was. When the elevator stopped I saw this man, Fiy Leu, only—you know how dark these old halls always are—I couldn't be sure who it was.

"Anyway, he stepped out and went over to the McReynolds' door and listened. He didn't see me because I was back around the stairs.

"I thought Maralie was in the elevator with him but Dennis told you she used the stairs. I wish I

knew." Jimmy sighed. "Then Fiy Leu sneaked back to the elevator and went on up to the third."

"Where was Maralie all that time?"

"That's what I want to know," said Jimmy, wretchedly. "She preceded me by about three minutes. I just saw her enter the lobby and by the time I got to the door she was out of sight. I saw the elevator standing there and supposed that she was in it. So, I thought—well." Jimmy flushed. "I just thought I'd run up the stairs and catch her at the elevator door."

"I see," I said, though I wasn't so sure that I did. "Then when the elevator got to the second you thought Maralie was in it but this Fiy Leu stepped out, listened at the McReynolds' door, then went back to the elevator and on up to the third."

"That's it."

"Then that leaves the question of Maralie's whereabouts," said Edith. "She was either in her own apartment or else in the elevator going up."

"Didn't the maid answer the bell?" I asked.

"No," said Jimmy impatiently. "Didn't I tell you that no one answered. She said when I asked her about it at the inquest that the two maids were out. You know the McReynolds take their meals at the Arms and have only two maids. So there was no one else."

"But that left Maralie! Couldn't she have let you in?"

"If she was there," said Jimmy grimly.

Edith and I exchanged a look of comprehension. Then that was what Jimmy was afraid of—that she had not been in her apartment but was in the elevator with Fiy Leu. It must have been a shock to him to come down to find Fiy Leu murdered, thinking Maralie had been with him only minutes before.

The E-string! But Maralie couldn't have had time to run into her apartment, seize the string off her violin and run back—the whole thing was absurd.

"How about the elevator, Jimmy?" Edith asked suddenly. "Did it stay up at the third?"

"No—and that puzzled me." Jimmy rubbed his hands across his eyes wearily. "It went up to the third, stopped a minute and came down to first—then after about five or ten minutes it went up again and after a minute or two came down, not stopping at the second either time."

"Was Dennis in it the last time?"

"Why—I suppose so."

"It's electrically controlled, you know," said Edith. "If we weren't so timid we wouldn't need an elevator boy. All we have to do is press buttons."

"I don't know that that matters. Dennis won't tell us anything anyway—even supposing he knows anything to tell."

"But he said Maralie was not in the elevator with Fiy Leu."

"There are two more flights of stairs besides the outside ones on the

back porches," responded Jimmy gloomily.

"Then the glove . . ." speculated Edith.

"Oh, the glove didn't mean anything. She just happened to drop it in the lobby and Aunt Mel picked it up."

"Then why, Jimmy Davidson, did you warn me not to speak of it at the inquest?" I asked indignantly.

"So as not to draw any attention to her." His expression was exasperated.

"Oh yes," I said hastily.

"I'm glad you told us all this, Jimmy." Edith's voice was relieved. "You don't know how Mel and I have worried about you. Watch your step, young man, and don't give us any more gray hairs." She patted her brown locks tenderly. "They may not show but, alas, I've got 'em!"

"H'nmp," I sniffed. Mine has been gray for several years.

"If you ladies could know how proud I am when you consent to let me take you out," murmured Jimmy abstractedly. "You see, Aunt Mel, if I only knew why Dennis has shut up so suddenly . . ."

"And how that cigarette case got in here . . ."

"And the message—oh, Jimmy! We forgot it. Did you get it translated?"

Jimmy smiled a little at Edith's eagerness. "Not yet—I had to choose my translator with discretion, you know—for I couldn't tell what it might mean. As it happens, though, he is a young Chinese University student—half-Chinese, looks and acts like a white man. He said it was Chinese and in cipher—but he'd have it for me in a day or two."

"Chinese and in a cipher," said Edith rather dazedly. "And we tried to read it, Mel."

"I've had enough of puzzles," I said, observing Jimmy's tired face. "Play something, Edith." He looked a little relieved, and settled back to listen. Edith has a delicacy of touch that is musical—indeed, she has a light and easy way of doing almost anything that interests her.

However, as luck, or ill-luck, had it, she started the heavy bass chords of the Rachmaninoff *Prelude in C Sharp Minor*. I shuddered involuntarily—the gradually ascending chromatics reminded me vividly of that cold blustery night when I had found what I found in the elevator cage.

I struggled with an impulse to ask her to stop but steeled myself to listen. The gloom seemed crystalized in the deep minors. Edith was playing soberly, interpreting as she seldom did the fantastical spirit of the thing. The flames had burned low. Jimmy was staring moodily into the smoldering log.

In a pause in the music I heard a wild burst of wind against the French windows—evidently the storm had come. I thought of Maralie alone in that empty flat upstairs. Not even the maids were there—she had given them a holiday until her father returned. I think Jimmy guessed my thought, for he turned

to me with a queer look in his eyes and started to his feet.

At that instant a revolver shot rang out over our heads! Through the music and above the rush of wind and sleet the sudden unmistakable sound reverberated. Edith's hands dropped with a discordant crash on the keys.

"Maralie!" I cried, my lips strangely stiff.

Jimmy whirled and was gone, Edith and I after him. At the McReynolds door stood Maralie, her face white in the dusk of the faintly lighted hall.

"Maralie," I heard Jimmy cry. Then she was in his arms and I heard him say over and over, "Maralie—Maralie!"

"I'm all right," she said, pushing him away. He dropped his arms, and stepped back.

"It was upstairs," she said, her voice trembling as she clung to me.

"Did you see anything—hear anything?" I asked hurriedly as the three of us ran up the stairs in Jimmy's wake.

"No! *No!*" she panted.

Jimmy was ringing the Townsends' bell and shaking the doorknob, shouting through the keyhole. Suddenly he raised his head with a queer expression. "Come here, Aunt Mel. I think you'd better smell this."

I bent over, and sniffed at the crack of the door. Then I met his eyes. *"Gas!"*

I heard a faint, choked-off cry beside me and turned in time to see Maralie swaying, her hands clenched, her face ghastly.

"Catch her, Edith—take her downstairs," I cried. Leaving them I ran down the long hall, my footsteps soundless on the heavy carpets. Perhaps the back door of the Townsend apartment would be unlocked.

I faltered involuntarily at the threshold leading to the back porch and glanced backward down the dim shadowy corridor. Edith and Maralie had already gone and Jimmy was bent over working at the lock. The sight of him nerved me. I pulled open the heavy baize-covered door, meant for a fire escape exit, and emerged onto the wet wind-swept porch. The door slammed unexpectedly behind me, leaving me in pitch darkness. A piercing gust of wind and rain froze my very blood. With cold fingers I fumbled along the wet wall.

It was only a few steps from the fire escape door to the Townsends' kitchen door but it seemed an age before I found the doorknob and cautiously turned it. A breath of stale air greeted me, not the deadly gas I had expected. Knowing the plan of the rear of each apartment was identical, I reasoned that the door from the butler's pantry into the dining room must be closed and the escaping gas confined to the living rooms.

I advanced, feeling my way slowly into the kitchen. If I could only find the light. Over by the pantry door should be the switch. Suddenly some sixth sense made me pause—hold my breath and listen.

Had I heard a rustle, an odd sound as of something moving? Someone was in the pantry. I was sure of it. Eyes more accustomed to the dark than mine were watching my every move! My heart-beat nearly choked me. Surely whatever it was there in the pantry could hear it.

I was afraid to move, afraid to shift my weight. I couldn't make Jimmy hear me if I screamed and my throat was too dry to make a sound. I had the eerie feeling of leaden futile struggle that we have in nightmares. I wanted to reach the light switch, yet I was afraid.

Then I felt a rapid swish of air—and something brushed my arm. There was a swift fleeting contact and I sensed, rather than felt, the rush of movement. I heard nothing. In the inky blackness I could see nothing. But I could swear that the thing occurred.

Forgetting all about the light switch and sensing only that the thing, whatever it was, was now back of me, I fled across the narrow pantry and into the dining room, stumbling over a chair and finding my way around a vast dining-room table. Jimmy was there—just outside the heavy hall door!

I would call him—first the lights. I had never been in the Townsend flat before and through frightened haste and in the stifling darkness I had become confused. Was this the drawing room or library? The arrangement was the exact opposite of my own flat.

Not a ray of light penetrated the gloom. I had not noticed the gas for a moment but now the heavy sickish sweet smell was overpowering. I caught myself with a start—I must get out of this, reach the window.

But where was the window? The grisly sound was repeated once, a long stertorous, shuddering sigh! And then that deadly unbearable silence!

With stark horror in my heart I flung myself away from it and fell against a portiere. It was a door, the hall door, for I heard the rasp of Jimmy's knife in the lock. I was dizzy, gasping for breath. The darkness was moving—my ears buzzed . . .

"Jimmy!" I gasped—and all at once the floor moved away from me and I went down, down into a black void . . .

* * * * *

". . . only a faint," a cool voice was saying.

"Not the gas then?" Something was scratching my cheek and I moved my head.

"No—she couldn't have got enough of it—just fright. She—hello, she's coming to!"

I forced my heavy eyelids up. "The light switch . . ." I mumbled idiotically. "It's over there—oh, you found it."

"All right, Aunt Mel?" Jimmy was bending over me anxiously.

"All right." My voice was very weak but I began to remember. "The gas, Jimmy, did you . . . ?"

"I got in just in time."

"Where . . . ?" I struggled to a

sitting position, thus discovering that my scratchy pillow was Jimmy's rolled-up coat. I was in the long corridor just outside the Townsend door. It was lighted now and I saw several figures at the apartment door.

Then a man, evidently a doctor, leaned over me with an authoritative air and took my wrist in his fingers. I suffered it in silence, still feeling a little dazed.

"She'll do now," he said to Jimmy briskly. "You've had a bad fright, Miss Standish. Go to your own flat, take some whisky if you have anything of the kind and go to bed."

I blinked at him stupidly. "What happened?"

"We'll have to tell her. It's better anyway." Jimmy's tones were grave. "I'll tell her myself."

"Tell me what?"

"Mr. Townsend is dead."

"Dead!"

"A suicide," explained the doctor.

"A suicide—gas?"

"Yes."

"But I heard him die."

"Good Lord, Aunt Mel!"

"I *did*. I heard . . ." my voice died whispering, and I began to tremble.

"Stop that!" cried the doctor sharply, observing incipient hysterics.

"See here, Aunt Mel." Jimmy spoke distinctly, guessing that I wanted to know everything. "I got in just in time to pull you out. Then I found Mr. Townsend, dead, in the next room and the room filled with gas. I opened the windows, and called Dr. Stillwell here and the police. You've been unconscious and scaring me to death for twenty minutes."

"Give me your hand, Jimmy." I scrambled to my feet.

"I'm taking you downstairs," said Jimmy.

"Hey!" At that moment a policeman hailed him and in a hushed voice requested him "to step this way for a minute." So Dr. Stillwell helped me downstairs—and strange to say I needed help for my knees were like jelly. Jimmy caught up with us at our door. Under his arm was a mop of soft fur and on his face a frown.

"See here, doctor," he said in a low voice. "How does a man die when he is gassed?"

"Quietly, easily, as if he had gone to sleep." The two men looked at each other, and a queer question grew in the doctor's eyes. "You mean . . ."

"Exactly!"

"It might be . . ." mused Dr. Stillwell.

"What?"

"Don't say anything, Aunt Mel, but Townsend—well, he didn't die quietly."

"His face was distorted, bad color, too—and he'd evidently writhed. I beg your pardon, Miss Standish."

IX

"Here." Jimmy thrust the bundle he carried in his arms into mine. It

turned up bulbous eyes and a broad jet-black nose. I recognized Townsend's Pekinese.

"Where did you get this?" I held the dog gingerly.

"In the Townsends' flat. It came out from under a chair, scared to death."

"Out from under a chair?" I repeated. "Why, if there was enough gas to kill a man—"

"There was enough to kill a dog," finished Jimmy. "Isn't that so, Dr. Stillwell?"

"Yes," replied the doctor contemplatively.

"It struck me as peculiar—and yet it seemed such an obvious suicide."

"We'll go back up," said Jimmy. "Get something hot to drink, Auntie. I'll be in later."

He and Dr. Stillwell disappeared together.

Confused, I fumbled at the lock. Not enough gas to kill a small Pekinese—and he, Townsend, did not die quietly. Then it was not a suicide, though evidently meant to look like one. The fearful experience I had had in the kitchen was true!

"Come in, you poor thing." Edith's warm voice greeted me and the Pekinese leaped from my arms.

The warm lighted rooms were a welcome sight. Maralie and Edith fussed over me anxiously as I told them briefly the whole story, save the last part. I would tell Edith when alone with her that it was not a suicide but some inner warning kept me from telling Maralie.

They were both white when I had finished. The dog had jumped into Maralie's lap, cuddling there luxuriously as if he were an old acquaintance.

"Let's have tea," I said finally. "*Norah!*" Norah was in the kitchen, her face ashen as she questioned us. "Hurry with the tea, Norah," I said. "We're cold. Yes, it was a suicide."

She crossed herself fearfully, and her eyes fell on the dog. "Oh, Holy Mother!" she cried in alarm. "And is it a h'athen dog you've brought back?"

Maralie set the dog abruptly on the floor but it followed her persistently, crawling into her lap again as soon as she sat down. Edith came out of her daze to stir up the fire but the horror of the thing upstairs possessed us all and we sat in oppressed silence. Tea relieved us a little. It was accompanied by a scared and inarticulate Norah, who served it with shaking fingers and offered us cinnamon sticks instead of the crystalized ginger which I prefer.

"Don't be a fool, Norah," I said finally as her eyes nearly started out of their sockets at the sight of the Pekinese raising his two front paws suddenly to beg for a cake. "It's only a dog."

"Ah but, ma'am—ain't—ain't the varmint one that old Townsend had?"

"Mr. Townsend," I corrected automatically. Norah was a problem at times.

Norah continued in a stage whis-

per. "Did you say he was a suicide, ma'am?"

"Yes," I said brusquely. "You can go, Norah. I'll finish serving." But she hovered in the dining room just outside the circle of light.

Looking back upon that hour it seems to me it was the last little breathing spell we had. From then on events occurred with such paralyzing swiftness that we scarcely knew where we were.

Jimmy finally came in, explaining he could stay only a minute. His eyes were gleaming and I felt in my heart that he had at last in his possession some definite clue to the solution of the mystery.

"It was prussic acid," he said. "I'm glad we had Stillwell instead of Bascom."

"Prussic acid?" repeated Edith. "You mean he wasn't a suicide?"

"Not with gas anyhow—and it doesn't look as if he is a suicide at all. At least we found two glasses with remains of whisky in them and Stillwell is sure one contained prussic acid. He's taking it to have it analyzed."

"But he may have been a suicide anyway," I said.

"No, I don't think so. You see, there were two empty glasses, each showing traces of whisky. That would indicate there were two people. If one of the glasses contained prussic acid it would look as if the poison had been placed there by one of the two men, with a purpose.

"When a man commits suicide he goes off alone to do it—usually. Townsend was poisoned. Stillwell is certain. There was somebody in the apartment who wanted the murder to appear a suicide and turned on the gas. He must have been frightened away by us or in desperate haste, for he left the glasses untouched.

"Possibly it was the murderer himself or possibly it was Shive Townsend. Perkins says the servants were out but Townsend stayed in all day. Shive went out at noon and came back just before he heard the revolver shot."

"How long before?"

"Perkins says he had taken Shive up to the third floor. Some trifling thing went wrong with the mechanism of the elevator and he stuck between second and third, fixing it. It was then he heard the revolver shot. It took a minute or two to fix the lever, so he didn't get up to the third until just in time to help me with the lock."

"Then Shive Townsend was up there. Where is he now?"

"We don't know. We can't find him. Of course there's the back stairs. He could have escaped that way."

"But that revolver shot?"

"That's one thing I can't understand." Jimmy frowned in perplexity. "Old Townsend himself couldn't have fired it—we weren't five minutes getting to him. Did you notice anything, Aunt Mel?"

"Yes—that is I don't know," I said and told them what had happened in the kitchen.

"That's the man!" said Jimmy

triumphantly. "I'll bet it's Shive Townsend."

A little gasp interrupted him. We had forgotten Maralie. She stood watching us, her face pitifully haggard, one arm still clutching the dog. "I don't understand." Her voice shook and she paused to steady it. "You see, I'm engaged to marry Shive Townsend."

For a long moment we were silent—so silent I could hear my watch ticking and the muffled beat of a racing engine on the street outside. Maralie's eyes, black with fear, anxiety, whatever it was, went from one to another of us—then she ran into the sun parlor and closed the door.

Jimmy took a step after her and stopped, a strange look in his eyes. "I'll be going," he said abruptly. "See you in the morning." Before I could say anything he was gone.

Edith and I found Maralie sobbing helplessly over the bunch of tangled fur in her lap. "That's why the dog knows me, you see," she began and told us the whole story.

It was money, she supposed. Anyway, her father had arranged it—and when after pointing out its obvious advantages she still refused had explained that he had had serious business reverses, that he must have money, that she could save him by marrying Shive Townsend.

"But they were all in such a hurry," she choked. "Father, and Shive and—and Mr. Townsend. If they only will wait."

"Don't be a fool, Maralie," I said severely.

"I can't help it. I've got to now—I promised," she said helplessly.

Edith gave me a look meaning, "Shut up," and took one of Maralie's hands, patting it gently. "Something will turn up, don't you worry. You don't want to marry Shive Townsend, do you?"

"No!"

"Now that his father is dead maybe . . ."

"Don't!" cried Maralie.

Edith and I exchanged glances and Edith bent over Maralie gently. "What is it, Maralie? What did you hear or see?"

"That shot, that awful revolver shot—" Maralie's eyes darted wildly around the room and she lowered her voice to a whisper that made my flesh creep—"and Su Ling."

"Who is Su Ling?"

"I've seen him before. He's a friend of Townsend's. At least he goes up there."

"Where did you see him?"

"On the stairs, the back stairs, running."

"Did you fire a revolver?" asked Edith relentlessly but Maralie had begun to sob again and could not reply.

Seeing that the girl was in a nervous and overwrought state, I took matters into my own hands and got her into bed, giving her a mild sedative and sitting beside her until she relaxed into a flushed and troubled sleep.

Who was Su Ling? Who had fired the revolver? Maralie's story, as it concerned her father, worried me also. True, I had never particularly

liked Mr. McReynolds. He was a silent taciturn individual with a narrow long face and bad color—but though I knew him very little I felt surprised to hear of his cold-blooded plan for Maralie. Surely he need not sacrifice his only daughter. I had very little sleep during the course of that night.

The next morning Maralie disappeared. It was right after breakfast, a dreary and half-hearted affair, that she put on her cloak, saying she was going to the drug store—for tooth paste, I think it was.

I hadn't noticed the time and it was Norah who drew my attention to it. "Is Miss Maralie in her room?" she asked. "I want to dust."

With a start I looked at the clock. It was ten-thirty. She had been gone at least an hour and a half. I don't know why I was so immediately alarmed. However, I think Edith shared my fright, though she seemed cool.

We first went over to the corner drug store but Maralie had not been there at all.

"She couldn't have gone far without her hat," I said worriedly. "Did she have her hat, Edith?"

"No—that is, I'm not sure."

We rang the bell of the McReynolds's flat but it seemed to be empty. By that time we were thoroughly frightened, yet we hesitated to institute a real search.

"She's probably gone to some friends," said Edith and I agreed. We didn't know many of her acquaintances but we telephoned those we did know. No one had seen her that morning.

"I'm going to call Jimmy," I said finally. "I can't stand this waiting. Surely she would either return or let us know her whereabouts by now."

I found Jimmy at the office. "Maralie—gone?" he said.

"We can't find her."

There was a silence. Then his voice sounded again, harsh and strained. "I'm coming right out."

In less time than I could have believed he was there, his face drawn and strangely old. "I notified the police," he said.

"Oh, Jimmy, the publicity!"

"We can't consider that. She's got to be found. Tell me all you can."

"There isn't anything to tell." I explained the situation.

"They've got her," said Jimmy.

"Who are *they?*"

"I don't know exactly." He looked at his watch. "I'll tell you all I can, Aunt Mel. Maybe you can help me." Without removing his coat Jimmy went on rapidly, "I told you it was Fiy Leu, the man in the elevator? Well, I proved it, wrote a story on it, but the city editor blue-penciled the whole thing, and said to keep quiet.

"I began to suspect that somebody—somebody big—was in it but I wasn't sure. Then the inquest—that farce of an inquest—showed me my suspicion was true. They didn't want to know who the man was or how he died. But they failed in hushing it up with you and

Maralie involved in it. Remember how the coroner questioned you? He was paving the way there—you for a goat if things went wrong."

"I see." I nodded. "And Maralie . . . ?"

"I don't know but I think they didn't need her. Or maybe—"

"You mean they wanted to involve her so as to confuse the public in case they couldn't keep the murder hushed up?"

"Something like that. And then things went so well they didn't need her *or* you. I went to the city editor, told him what I thought and he finally said I could break the story if I could prove it conclusively. In other words, the man or men were too big to throw mud at but not too big to ruin—if I could prove it." Jimmy rubbed his forehead.

"I've been thinking—you see, it's like this, Aunt Mel—there's something, some scheme, that's gone wrong. There's been a quarrel about it and whoever is making money by it is paying to keep certain mouths shut."

"Dennis?"

"No." Jimmy shook his head decisively. "That boy is scared. And Maralie—they couldn't bribe her and they couldn't scare her—so they've taken her."

"Wait. She doesn't love Shive Townsend—it's her father . . ." I told him Maralie's story briefly and watched the beaten look go out of his eyes.

"I'll find her," he said solemnly as if taking an oath. He would have gone but I held him.

"Su Ling—she said she saw Su Ling on the stairs. Do you know who he is?"

"No." Jimmy's eyes narrowed. "But I'll find out. O'Brand knows, I'll bet. There's somebody back of O'Brand or I miss my guess. I've got a political wire I can pull that will bring O'Brand to his knees."

Feeling somewhat better I watched his battered roadster pass the corner at breakneck speed and out of sight. I didn't dream that Norah would give us our first real clew. It couldn't have been more than half an hour later that Edith came to me.

"Norah's sick," she said. "Awfully sick. I think she's got something. You'd best look at her." She sat down weakly, looking rather sick herself.

X

I found Norah lying half undressed across the bed in her little room off the kitchen. She was moaning, her face a yellow-green, her eyes shut tight, both hands pressed to her abdomen.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

She gurgled something and rolled over. I went to the kitchen, got a pint of lukewarm soda water and literally forced it down her throat. Fifteen minutes later a tired but relieved Norah, hair askew and gray flannel petticoats awry, lay back gasping on the pillows.

"You have a touch of ptomaine," I told her. "What have you been eating?"

"Only them sardines," she said.

"Not those in the can I opened yesterday for the cat? Good Heavens, Norah!"

She opened her eyes meekly and closed them again. "You ought to know better than that," I began but she moaned wretchedly and I ceased.

"Here! Take off your corsets. Where's a nightgown?" Leaning over to pick up the clothes she had wriggled from painfully, my fingers encountered the wide firm hem of the flannel petticoat. How thick it was, I thought idly as I shook it out, before putting it away. Had she leaded tape in it? It certainly felt like it. Such an excess of modesty!

"What have you sewed in the hem of your petticoat, Norah?" I inquired with curiosity, feeling with the tips of my fingers the ropelike little lumps.

She mumbled something and made a negative gesture. The little lumps were regular, either separate or held together by a thread. Under the flannel they felt smooth and rather hard. They felt, indeed like —with a swift movement I reached for a pair of scissors on the bureau and paying no heed to Norah's exclamation I cut ruthlessly into the hem.

Three capsules fell out!

For a second I stared at them, unwilling to believe my eyes! What were they? I took one, pulled the top gingerly off so as not to spill the hard reddish-brown grains. I touched the substance with my finger, smelled it, finally touched it recklessly with the tip of my tongue. Bitter and yet sickishly sweet! I knew immediately what it was—*opium!*

I dropped the capsules and without a word to Norah ran to the bathroom to scrub my tongue with my toothbrush. *Opium*—in Norah's gray-flannel petticoat!

My mind seething, I returned to Norah's room. "What is it, Miss Mel? How did they get there?"

"Don't you know?"

She shook her head. I ripped open the whole hem. There they were, packed neatly and at regular distances. There must have been forty of them. "When did you put this petticoat on?" I asked.

"This morning."

"Where had it been since its return from the laundry?"

"There, in that drawer."

Opium in the petticoat hem—the petticoat in the laundry! There ran through my mind in quick succession the confused laundry, Mr. Townsend's insistence, the Chinese, the conversation I had overheard. Could it be that they were referring not to the cigarette case but to this?

Then it was smuggling, opium smuggling, we had run onto. Evidently they had made some mistake, had confused the laundry bundles. No wonder Mr. Townsend had shown such remarkable anxiety. I remembered the intruder whose hand-print we had found on the desk surface.

That peculiarly small hand!

Could it have belonged to the Chinese? Could it be that the Chinese was the "Su Ling" of whom Maralie had spoken? *Maralie!* Heaven only knew where she was if this were the explanation!

"In this drawer?" I asked Norah.

"Yes," she answered, then caught herself and an expression of alarm flashed over her face. "Oh, no, *no!* The other one!"

Ready now to suspect anything I pulled open the drawer I had indicated in spite of her amendment. She didn't want me to open the top drawer, that was plain. Therefore I would do so.

She fell back on the bed in consternation. Handkerchiefs, stockings, heavy muslin underclothes lay all in impeccable order. I felt carefully the hems and seams but found no more capsules—found none indeed in any of the laundry that had been returned the afternoon preceding the murder. But from the corner of the paper-lined drawer I pulled the missing cigarette case with F.L. on its face.

Bewildered, I faced Norah. She was white with terror. "You may as well tell me all about it," I said firmly.

"I didn't know how it was going to turn out," she cried, as if resistance were futile. "Dennis meant no harm, poor lad. It was only a tip to him, and a chance to come in here for a minute. He—"

"Wait! Let me get it straight as you go. Why should he come in here?"

"Why?" If possible her eyes widened still further. "Why, he's my nephew—my own sister's boy! Why indeed! Wouldn't you expect me to give the lad a handout once in awhile—a piece of pie maybe or a bite of cake." She broke off abruptly, realizing that she had committed herself, and eyed me with doubt.

"Go on," I said grimly. Dennis her nephew! "So he was in the habit of coming in here for a piece of pie or a bite of cake. Now what was the tip and why?"

"It was only to leave the elevator at the third for a little while and get five dollars. Indeed, 'twas nothing-seeming, Miss Mel, and Dennis took the five and slipped down the back-stairs, and into the kitchen to see me, little dreaming that he'd come out and find the elevator dark and when he turned on the lights—saints preserve us—a dead man!"

Then I was not the only one to make that grisly discovery! One thing, at least, was explained. "It was Dennis who turned on the light in the cage while I went after O'Brand?"

"Yes—I guess so. Anyway he left the light going—and then, ma'am, scared to death, he came back to me, and I went with him to his mother's down at—well, you was there, Miss Mel, so Dennis told me."

"But the cigarette case?"

"Dennis found it on the elevator floor. He'd dropped it, the man who was killed. Dennis was showing it to me, intending to return it, then when he found—*that*—in the ele-

vator. I hid the case in the first place I could think of and that was under the radiator.

"I wouldn't want Dennis to have the dreadful thing found on him. You could've knocked me over with a feather, ma'am, when I saw you'd found it!" Norah shivered. It was evident that she was still considerably frightened.

"And after that you turned off the lights here and went off with Dennis?"

"Scared of our lives, Miss Mel. What with the Chinaman upstairs and Dennis apt to lose his job and his mother needing the money—"

"Chinaman? *What* Chinaman?"

"The one on the third, of course. The one that gave him the tip. A poor-looking little man, said Dennis, with them flapping sandals on and looking like he'd oughta keep the five dollars himself."

"Norah." I leaned forward, almost holding my breath. "Was it the Chinaman who was the murderer?"

If Norah was white before she was ghastly now. At first I thought she would not answer, but between fright and nausea she was momentarily abject. She looked carefully around the room and then fixed her eyes warily on the door. And, "'Twas Miss Maralie," she whispered.

"No! It *couldn't* be!"

Norah only nodded. She would say no more.

Finally I retired, first gathering up the capsules to seal away in an envelope, then getting a hot-water bag and mustard plaster for Norah. She complained the next day of blisters on her feet and a burned spot on her stomach, from which I was led to believe that I had got the respective destinations of the hot-water bag and mustard plaster unhappily confused.

I told Edith the whole thing, not even omitting Norah's last statement, so positively uttered that it made my blood chill and the gooseflesh come on my arms.

"If Maralie did it," said Edith, from a stunned silence, "there was some reason, some justification."

"But—oh, Edith! It's too awful! Jimmy in love with a—"

"*Hush!*" cried Edith. "Don't say that, Mel. If she did it there is a reason and it can't make her one whit less fine. Indeed, when we know everything—if we ever do—we may love her the more for it."

"Yes," I said, "that's true. If we only knew where she is now. That she is safe and not in the clutches of—"

"Oh, Mel, *don't!* Surely she's only at some friend's or—somewhere. She'll be back perhaps to laugh at the fuss we've made and tease us for notifying the police."

"I wish I could believe it. Somehow, Edith, I feel uneasy. I've felt this way all week. It's worse today than it was yesterday."

Edith glanced at me quickly. "Do you feel that way, too?" She laughed nervously. "I've got the creeps myself. Jump every time I see a shadow. That Peke in there gets my nerves.

He's done nothing but sit on Maralie's bedroom slippers and grieve."

I stepped to the door. Sure enough there was the forsaken Pekinese, a miserable and dejected brown mop, lying flat on the rug, his head on Maralie's small satin mules, his nose suzzled into the yellow fluffs on the toes, his dark eyes roving disconsolately above them. Poor miserable lonely little dog!

"You should have seen Pank! You know, Mel, cats are queer. I believe they're psychic." There was an uneasy note in Edith's voice that was strange. "She came in rampant, cock-of-the-walk as usual. I looked for a battle but the dog never stirred, didn't even blink. And Pank —she's been watching him just like that ever since. She didn't growl or hiss or anything. *Look* at her!"

Pank was seated, tail spread flat behind her and neck arched, on the chifforette top above the dog. Her great eyes were fixed in a steady unwinking stare upon him. I stood looking at the queer picture for a long moment, then shook myself impatiently.

"It gets you too, doesn't it?" said Edith. "It's so darned queer!"

"I wish we'd hear from Maralie," I said, left Pank and the Pekinese to continue their unearthly vigil and went back to the more cheerful living room.

"If we only knew something." Edith sighed. "It's so terrible this way—this uncertainty."

I'm not an imaginative woman but thanks to the two murders and then Maralie's disappearance—I kept seeing awful visions. Every horrible tale of a disappearance I had ever read in the newspapers came crowding into my thoughts.

"They say things go in threes," said Edith and her dreadful suggestion made the hair on my head stir. "There's the bell," she cried as the long peal rang through the apartment. "Maybe it's—I'll answer it!"

A moment later Edith stuck her head into the room to say in a perplexed tone, "It's a Mr. Snivel—to see you. Shall I tell him to come up?"

"Why—yes. I never heard of him. At least if I have I can't remember it."

Edith met the man at the door and I looked up as they entered, then sprang to my feet. Checkered suit, yellowish eyes, chinless head—it was the man I had seen during my quest of Dennis—the man who, I was sure, had followed me. Determined to deal firmly with him I advanced.

"Mr. Snivel," I said.

He winced. "Pardon me, Snively —Snively," he said hastily. "I'm the bearer of a message, Miss Standish. Shall we sit down?"

His impertinent manner antagonized me. "I think you can deliver it standing," I replied dryly and heard a stifled giggle from Edith, who remained in the background.

The chinless gentleman had the grace to blink but continued with unabated smoothness. "Mr. F. S. Masters has empowered me—that is I have the pleasure of offering you . . ." He fumbled in his pocket,

got out an unsealed letter and without another word handed it to me.

I have seldom been so utterly helpless with bewilderment as I was when I read that Miss Melvina Standish had been appointed supervisor of nurses for the Burney Hospital, a privately endowed institution out on the West Side, at a salary of—here is where I gasped—ten thousand dollars a year for three years.

"What—is the meaning of this?" I asked frigidly though my breath was nearly knocked out of my body.

Mr. Snively looked at Edith. "May I speak to you alone?" he said to me.

"No," I replied. "This lady is in my confidence."

He looked dubious but finally shrugged. "All right, all right," he said. "Guess you're together in this anyhow. Though"—he glanced severely at Edith—"we ain't got any more ten-grand jobs to hand out."

"Kindly explain."

"Well, this appointment—you've heard of Masters?"

I nodded. Who had not? Rich influential cunning hands in front, donating to charities, hands behind dipping into any kind of money-making deviltry. Ugly stories were whispered of him but he still continued to hide behind his money.

Snively hesitated. Then as if he had made up his mind he went on, "Well, miss, I may as well come right out and tell you. I can always tell about you ladies." He bowed with an ingratiating smirk.

"Get to the point, Mr. Snivel."

"Oh, Miss Standish! I beg you—*Snively*, not Snivel!" He shuddered.

Something in my eye seemed to affect him disagreeably however for he replaced the handkerchief hurriedly. "It's this, Miss Standish. Mr. Masters wishes *you* to have this splendid position. If in return for the favor you are inclined to oblige him—why so much the better."

"Oblige him—how?"

"By doing nothing." His words slipped out significantly. "By doing nothing—just forgetting."

I stared. "What do you mean?"

"Just forgetting anything you've seen—anything you've heard—anything you"—he thrust his head forward—"anything you have found."

Masters and opium-smuggling and the murdered man's cigarette case—pieces of the puzzle were falling together! It was opium-smuggling then, with F. S. Masters back of it. His influence had hushed Jimmy's story.

Now he was trying to bribe *me*. Evidently they were afraid of me. With difficulty I kept my eyes from straying to the bunchy white envelope that lay so innocently on the table near us.

I moistened my lips. "Tell Mr. Masters that I refuse his—offer. And moreover," I added, "a man with as bad a liver as you've got had better be concerning himself with more righteous dealings."

XI

When Snively had gone I dropped into a chair, my knees shaking.

Somehow I had not expected him to go without a struggle. Edith thought otherwise.

"If you could have seen yourself, Mel, your eyes and your face!"

"Do you realize what this means?"

"It's Masters—I think we'd better get in touch with Jimmy."

So we sallied forth in hastily donned coats. Jimmy, as we might have expected, was out. But he had left an address on his desk with a message appended.

"He must be on a ticklish trail," said the young fellow who answered our queries. "He says, 'O'Connor with me. If not heard from in two hours send police help.' O'Connor is a police sergeant," said the boy. "Friend of Davidson's."

We thanked him perfunctorily and went out to the waiting taxi. There could be only one trail Jimmy was following.

"We ought to have revolvers, or something," said Edith regretfully.

Our thrill diminished considerably as the streets grew narrower and dingier. Our uneasiness grew.

We had to go through the market streets at a snail's pace, crawling past long open tables laden with fog-soaked wares, fish markets, old iron, dresses, pigeons, vegetables, fowls, a table of used collars.

Finally we turned sharply, passed a row of dingy pool halls and saloons, turned again into an almost deserted street, passed a musty second-hand shop and drew up slowly before a still-darker still-dingier basement shop.

On one dirty window, painted in straggling letters, we saw the legend —JOHN LEE, ANTIQUES.

No one was about. The unpainted door, coated with many years' Chicago soot, was closed. Peering through the low bleary windows, almost on a level with our knees, we could see a sort of showcase displaying an array of china, some brasses, a dusty, white-marble bust, some of last summer's flypaper with a few dead flies still sticking.

Edith's presence gave me small reassurance. But determined at least to find Jimmy I led the way down the muddy steps and pushed open the door.

"How queer!" whispered Edith. "Look at the shelves, Mel."

Up and down the narrow length of the shop we saw the blurred outline of two or three long shelves, about eight feet in height, packed with masses of articles for sale. There were narrow dark aisles between them. The small circle of light over a dusty old desk relieved but did not penetrate the darkness.

No proprietor was about—and no Jimmy. It was very still. I jumped as Edith's elbow struck a heaped stack of books and one of them fell with a thud.

Where was Jimmy? Where was . . . There was a shuffling sound at the door and instinctively I pulled Edith after me into the heavier shadow between the shelves.

The door had opened and a man entered. He was Eurasian—Chinese and some other blood in unholy com-

bination. I decided he must be the proprietor, John Lee.

I held my breath. Could he see us? We were in the darkest shadow.

John Lee, if it was he, shuffled toward the back of the shop. He was arrested however by a creak of the door. Someone else was coming. If it were only Jimmy!

But it wasn't. It was the Chinese, the man I believed to be Su Ling! A conviction came over me that we were nearing the climax.

John Lee met the newcomer and for awhile we could not see them. We heard their voices, but we could not understand the words.

All at once, however, I became aware of another figure passing between us and the light. I felt Edith grip my shoulder.

"It's Shive Townsend," she breathed in my ear. Mercifully they had switched to English.

The voices were easily distinguishable, with Su Ling questioning Shive Townsend. "But I haven't and I can't help it," Shive was explaining. "Wait till after the inquest tomorrow and I'll have it."

"You plomise long time now."

"Inquest?" repeated John Lee.

"That fool, Dr. Stillwell, found out what had happened."

"That's bad," said John Lee.

"It's his fault, like the other," that was Shive Townsend's voice.

"Givee money," Su Ling's repeated. "Get girl."

"You *dog!*"

"Look out!" That was John Lee.

"I haven't got the money."

"You took last three—sold two, no money, plomise, plomise all time. Now sold this—where money?"

"I tell you I never saw the third!"

"You in old missee's flat."

"Old missee"— That was me!

"But I never saw the stuff. It was your own mistake that lost it."

"Not mine—boy's," Su Ling paused. "Boy now in river."

"You stole it yourself."

Su Ling broke into fierce words and was interrupted by John Lee.

"Well, how do *I* know," I heard Shive say finally.

"How about the other two?" This from John Lee.

"I'll have the money after the inquest," said Shive.

"You takee money," cried Su Ling furiously. "Steal—lie—cheat!"

"You call *me* a cheat! What about *you?*"

"Had to put in elevat'—no place —no time."

"You lie! You did it purposely."

We heard a short scuffle, labored panting breaths.

"Stop that, Su Ling. Make him tell you first." John Lee's words had a vicious and sinister meaning. Did I imagine it or did I hear a noise at the door and a cautious movement?

"You killed my father!"

"Suppose I did! Must have money." Su Ling spoke coolly.

"Stop that! *Wait!*" A blow, quick steps—and a queer bubbling grunt.

What followed is blurred in my mind. I remember a rushing sound as of feet running—a movement

past us. Then all at once the place was much lighter.

"All right, O'Connor!"

"Get 'em, Doc?"

"That's right!"

Jimmy's voice! I'll never forget the sight that met my eyes.

Jimmy exultant, a revolver in his hands—shadows of three or four policemen—Su Ling and John Lee, their hands stiffly behind them—Dr. Stillwell kneeling at the side of Shive Townsend, who lay huddled limply against the shelf.

I started toward them.

"He's not dead yet," I heard Dr. Stillwell say. "But we can't do anything. It won't be long."

I advanced into the light.

"Aunt Mel!"

Dr. Stillwell looked up and I heard his amazed *"Miss Standish!"*

The light wavered erratically, was thrust into someone's hand and a small figure crossed, running to fling itself upon me. Maralie.

I remember but vaguely the chaotic events that followed, the patrol wagon, the ambulance gleaming strangely white in the dark street, the long wait. I remember the group around Shive Townsend, the questioning voices, the faint choking murmurs from the dying man.

Then there was a hush and I saw Jimmy taking rapid notes. Then Jimmy was locking the door and we were riding homeward.

Norah lingered in the corner while Jimmy told his story.

"Shive Townsend killed Fiy Leu," he said simply. "Su Ling held him while Townsend slipped the E-string . . ." He paused significantly, then resumed. "John Lee went all to pieces and told the rest."

"We heard Su Ling confess to murdering Mr. Townsend."

"How did you happen to come?" asked Jimmy and chuckled when I told him.

"I might have known I couldn't keep the two of you out."

"But Jimmy," said Edith, "Why did Shive Townsend kill Fiy Leu? And how did he get in the elevator?"

"Begin at the beginning, Davidson," said Dr. Stillwell.

"It was this way"—Jimmy spoke deliberately, as if trying to arrange things in the order in which they occurred—"there was a scheme to smuggle opium through the laundry. Mr. Townsend, Fiy Leu—"

"Masters," I interrupted.

"How did you know that?"

I told them what had happened —and tore open the envelope to show the capsules.

XII

"Then you—*you* found the missing batch of opium?" said Jimmy.

"In Norah's flannel petticoat."

"Well"—Jimmy shot a glance at Dr. Stillwell—"can you beat that!"

"Go on," begged Edith.

"Where was I—oh, yes! And Masters. Snively, Aunt Mel, is a henchman of Masters. I got that from O'Brand.

"It was Masters who fixed the coroner and Bascom and kept O'Brand in pay not to report or even notice anything unusual that

went on around here. O'Brand told that much when we got him talking this noon. If it hadn't been for Shive Townsend running amuck and selling a couple of consignments privately they'd never have been caught. That, and the mistake of one of Su Ling's assistants, who put the opium in your laundry.

"I think Townsend set Su Ling on your trail then, Aunt Mel."

"Then Townsend unlocked the French door!" cried Edith.

"And Su Ling's hand-print on the desk," I added.

"Remember, Su Ling wasn't any too sure the opium was here. He knew Shive Townsend might have stolen it. Fiy Leu wanted his share of the money. The afternoon of his murder he insisted. Shive, with his own life in danger, killed Fiy Leu. Tell them Maralie."

Maralie shuddered but spoke bravely. "It was my violin string. I saw the knot in it at the inquest, just at the place where mine had snapped the evening before. He had called and I was playing and when the E-string broke he laughed and put it in his pocket and said he'd keep it because—because . . ."

"Because it had been hers." Jimmy moved to the arm of Maralie's chair. "Su Ling was there too. He's of Shive Townsend's tong and bound under oath to give assistance in certain conditions."

"Shive Townsend's own tong?" I broke in. "Then he *is* Chinese."

"Was," corrected Jimmy. "But Su Ling hated the Townsends and saw a chance to get them into trouble. So he bribed Dennis to leave the elevator at the third floor.

"Su Ling put the dead body of Fiy Leu in the elevator and brought it down to the first. And all that time," Jimmy added, "I was mooning around, wondering what had happened to Maralie."

"And I," said Maralie, her cheeks pink, "was in our apartment, not daring to answer the bell."

"She thought she ought to obey her father," said Jimmy.

"Seeing you made it so much harder," confessed Maralie naïvely.

Jimmy looked at her as if he could never look long enough, then suddenly bent, tipped back her head and kissed her full on the lips, right there before us all.

"Saints preserve us all!" blurted Norah. "And I thought it was Miss Maralie!"

"Dennis thought that too, on account of the violin string," Jimmy went on. "Then Su Ling slipped out the back way, Aunt Mel came in, found Fiy Leu and went after O'Brand. Dennis came out of your apartment. He turned on the light in the cage and saw Fiy Leu. He got scared and told Norah. They both left to take counsel with Dennis's mother."

"And he came down with mumps that very night," murmured Norah.

"Snively followed me then, saw I had found Dennis and—"

"Went in and threatened, involving him in a murder trial if he didn't keep his mouth shut. Then Shive wouldn't fork over. Su Ling

tried to get it from old Townsend, who knew the whole story. They quarreled and Townsend threatened him with prison. So Sunday Su Ling went up and slipped prussic acid in Townsend's drink.

"Shive returned just in time, found his father dying and Su Ling trying to get away. He followed Su Ling down the first flight of stairs, shot at him and missed."

Maralie shivered and Jimmy placed a protecting arm around her shoulders. "She was coming out of their apartment and saw it."

"Maralie! Tell us how it happened."

"I don't know exactly. It was dark this morning, you know, and as I stepped out to the lobby door two men jumped from the shadows on either side of the door and dragged me into a sedan. They didn't hurt me, but I—it was terrible."

"Jimmy—there at John Lee's—how did you come there?"

"It was on the cipher in the cigarette case. The Chinese student unraveled it for me and Dr. Stillwell and I went to investigate.

"The shop was half dark when we got there about four this afternoon, so we slipped in back of those shelves. Su Ling was out. We found Maralie locked in a back room but it was a simple matter to get her out. About that time John Lee appeared. We were ready to take a crack at him when along came Su Ling, then Shive Townsend and—you know the rest."

"Not how O'Connor and the police happened there."

"I tipped off O'Connor as soon as I got the address. Maybe I wasn't glad to find Maralie safe!"

There was a long silence. Maralie and Jimmy feasted their eyes on each other, and the rest of us were busy with our thoughts.

"You'll never know how near you came to being dragged into a murder trial, Aunt Mel."

Jimmy stood up, settled his tie and picked up his hat. "I've got to get downtown. Coming, doctor?"

"Wait a minute, Jimmy," I cried. "Did O'Brand phone Masters before he called the coroner?"

"Probably—to get his orders." Jimmy kissed Maralie again and hurried off, followed by Dr. Stillwell. We were finishing a late dinner when Jimmy telephoned.

"Thought you'd like to know. Just found out. The name was not Townsend. It was Tunsin! Maralie and I are getting married. Oh—and they've arrested Masters. 'Bye now. See you after the honeymoon."

the detective's dilemma

by . . . . . Cornell Woolrich

Inspector Burke could do nothing to save a man who insisted upon his own murder. But like all good detectives he knew how to uncover a killer after murder had occurred.

HE SENT HIS CARD in to me. We don't get much of that down at our shop. Not any, you might say. They're either dragged in or, if they come of their own accord, they just say who they are by word of mouth. What was on it pushed my brows up.

ARNOLDO, PRINCE OF IVERIA

With a crown over it! We don't get much of *that* either, down at our shop. I was so impressed I even talked it over with Crawley, who happened to be in the room at the time, before I did anything about having him shown in. Sort of trying to get my bearings.

"What the hell d'you suppose a guy like this could want? And he comes to us yet, instead of sending for us to come to him!"

"I suppose the family rubies have been stolen," Crawley snickered.

"In the first place, is he on the level or is he phony?"

"There is a party by that name," Crawley said. "I've seen it in the papers once or twice. Wait a minute, I can check, so we'll be that much ahead of him."

He seemed to know how to do it —I wouldn't have myself. He called some book or magazine called *Who's Who,* and also some very swank

Even the mystery-story business has its mysteries and Cornell Woolrich ranks high among them. Living the life of a semi-recluse in an aging Broadway hotel, Woolrich is one New York writer practically nobody knows. Yet this one-time Jazz-Age prodigy (Children of the Ritz) *has for decades, both as Woolrich and William Irish, produced some of the most vivid and ingenious mystery fiction since Sherlock Holmes retired to bee-keeping and Dr. Watson ran out of ink.*

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club, and managed to find out what he wanted without letting on we were police. "Get the genuine's description, while you're at it," I backseat-drove him.

When he got through he said: "The genuine article is about twenty-nine, nearly six feet tall, lean and light-haired. Looks more English than Latin."

The cop who had brought the card in nodded vigorously, said, "That's who's waiting out there right now!"

"All right, then we don't have to worry about phonies," I said, relieved.

"Here's a thumbnail sketch of the rest of it," Crawley said. "His own country don't exist any more, it was annexed by another country. He's married to an American girl, the former Marilyn Reid. Scads of dough. Her grandfather first invented chocolate bars with peanuts in 'em. They live out at Eastport."

"That ought to do. I hate to have to ask a lot of fool questions with a guy like this. Better not keep him waiting any more, O'Dare."

I was nervous by this time. I straightened the knot of my tie, polished the toe of my shoe against the opposite trouser leg, sat down and arranged a lot of papers in front of me, like I was up to my ears in work.

"How does this look?" I asked Crawley.

"Phony as hell—to me," he grinned. "But he won't know the difference."

The cop held the door open and there was one of those breathless waits, like in a play on the stage. He came in on a cane. For a minute I thought it was just swank, but then I could see he seemed to need it. A little shaky on his legs.

I didn't know how to address him, so I didn't. Just nodded.

Maybe he didn't know how to address me either, because he nodded back. He said, "Do you mind if I sit down? I'm not—very strong."

Crawley slid a chair up, and I said, "Sorry we kept you waiting like that—"

"I don't mind. You see, I had to come to you myself. If I'd sent for you, it would have defeated the very purpose—for which I've come to you."

I said, "What can we do for you, Your Highness?"

He shook his head. "There are no highnesses here. I'm taking out my first papers next month. But of course I won't live to become a full-fledged citizen—"

I looked at Crawley and he looked at me.

Iveria had taken out a hammered golden cigaret case with a sapphire clasp. I thought he wanted a smoke, but he didn't open it, just passed it to me.

"I may not be able to prevent it coming out that I stopped in here. In which case I shall say that I came in to report the loss of this very case.

"So suppose you keep it in the meantime, as an excuse. Let's say

some honest person found it and turned it in. You're holding it for me. That will explain my visit here. Is that all right with you?"

I could have told him that I was a homicide man and not the lost-and-found department but I didn't.

"If you want it that way, yes," I said uncertainly.

Again Crawley and I exchanged a look.

"Now, as to what I have actually come here about." He looked from one to the other of us. "I'm sorry but I don't intend to speak about it before more than one person. I want this held confidential between myself and just one detective or police official—until the time comes for this one official to act upon what I have told him today. Then let the whole world know. I'll be gone by then anyway. Now—can that be arranged?"

I didn't answer him right way.

He went on, "It's very painful, it's very personal, it's so subtle it will require a man of acutest perception and greatest tact."

I said, "Well, would you care to tell Crawley here? He's very perceptive and tactful—"

He took one look at him, then turned back to me. "You have just shown yourself to be the more tactful of the two by the very fact that you recommended him. He did not recommend you. You are the man I want. You are the man I would like to tell this to, if I may."

"I'm at your disposal," I said.

Crawley took it in good part. He said, "See you later," and eased out.

"And now—"

"Inspector Burke," I supplied.

"And now, Inspector Burke—" He opened his fluffy llama-wool coat, took a thick Manila envelope soldered with sealing wax out of its inner pocket. "This is an affidavit, duly notarized, which however merely restates what I am about to tell you verbally. It will bear more weight later than a verbal accusation, particularly after I am no longer alive. You will put it away, please, until the time comes for you to make use of it. Write your own name on it, show it to no one."

I scrawled *Burke, in re. Iveria* across it, went over and put it in the safe, along with the cigaret case. Then I came back and waited for him to begin.

He made a steeple out of his hands. "Now it is a very simple matter. Stated in its simplest form —which however does not do it justice—it is merely this—I am about to be killed by my wife. But without me you will not be able to prove that she did such a thing."

"I won't have to prove it, I'll prevent it—" I started to say.

He flexed his hand at me almost indifferently. "No, neither you nor I will be able to prevent it. It will surely happen. Nothing will be able to prevent it. For it's coming in such a small way. So, for all practical purposes, let's say I am already dead."

"We don't acquiesce in things like that over here." I said, but again he overrode me.

"But it is not right that she should do such a thing and remain unpunished, isn't it so? Or at least, enjoy the fruits of her crime, enjoy peace of mind afterwards—with *him*. That is why I have come to you ahead of time. Even so, you will have a very difficult time proving it. Without me you would never even be able to establish it *was* a murder."

I just sat there, eyeing him unblinkingly. Whatever else I was, I wasn't bored. He had the gift of holding you spellbound. Once the desk phone rang and I switched the call into another room without even trying to find out what it was.

"Here's the background, so you'll understand the thing fully," he said. "You must realize it is difficult for me to speak of these things to another man. But for present purposes you are not a man, you are a police official."

I considered that a dubious compliment but I let it go.

"So I'll hold nothing back. I am descended from a branch of the ruling house of what was formerly Iveria. I therefore bear in my veins both the assets and the liabilities of royalty." He smiled ruefully when he said that, I noticed.

"I met my wife, the former Marilyn Reid, years ago in St. Moritz and we were married there. She was supposedly enormously wealthy; both parents dead, sole heiress to the Reid peanut-bar fortune. I have seen American papers which thought it was one of those usual fortune-hunting matches and didn't hesitate to say so. I gave her the title, for what it was worth. She gave me the use of her money.

"As a matter of fact, it was quite the other way around. I was the wealthier of the two by far, even at the time of our marriage. On the other hand, through bad management and her own extravagance, the enormous estate that had come down to Marilyn from her grandfather was already badly depleted at the time I first met her and since then has dwindled away to nothing. Naturally, that isn't commonly known. Even if it were it wouldn't be believed. Say exiled aristocracy to people and they immediately think of poverty.

"The point is, I did not marry Marilyn for her money. When you see her face you won't have to be told why I did—she was the most beautiful girl in Europe and she still is the most beautiful in America today. Try to keep in mind—when the time comes—that she murdered me. It won't be easy to.

"The rest is rather shabby. I'll hurry over it as quickly as I can. I am ill, she married only a shadow of a man. But when a thing is once mine, I keep it. If she wanted freedom only for herself, I would give it to her. But she wants it for this —automobile racer.

"In Cannes we met Streak Harrison. She'd always had a mania for breakneck driving herself, so that gave him a good head start. What is there about boxers, airplane pilots,

dirt-track racers, that makes women lose their heads? After we'd been back six months and he had 'casually' turned up over here himself, she asked me for her freedom. I said no.

"She was tied hand and foot, the decision rested with me, and it has brought murder into her heart. She could not buy me off—*I* had the fortune and she no longer had a dime of her own by that time. She could not get a divorce, because divorce is not recognized in Iveria and my entire estate is there.

"Nor could she have it annulled on the grounds of my hereditary disability. I took pains to warn her of that before our marriage and there are documents in existence that will prove it. She went into the marriage with her eyes open.

"I am the last of my line. As my widow—but only as my widow—she would be sole inheritor under Iverian law.

"Now we come to my imminent murder. My affliction is haemophilia, the disease of kings. You know what that is." I did but he went on to illustrate anyway. "Once the blood begins to flow there is no checking it. There is imminent death about me all the day long. Things which to you are simply an 'Ouch!' and a suck at the finger, to me can mean death.

"For instance, I am sitting here in this office with you. There is a nail on the underpart of this chair. I touch it—so—and accidentally make a little puncture on the pad of my finger. Within a few hours, if they can't find a way of stopping it, I am done for."

"Don't do that again, will you?" I gasped, white-faced. I knew that chair, and there *was* a nail under it. Crawley had torn his pants on it once.

II

He smiled. He saw that he'd got his point across.

"But are you sure she contemplates actual murder, Iveria?"

"If I weren't, do you think I'd be here?"

"Let me ask you something—is she a very stupid woman, your wife?"

"She's one of the most keen-witted diabolically clever women there is to be met with."

"Then why should she risk murder? Granting that she wants to be rid of you, wants to marry this Harrison and at the same time enjoy your ancestral fortune, all she needs is a little patience. As you yourself said a few minutes ago, you bear imminent death about with you all day long. All she has to do is sit back and wait—"

"You forget something. I have lived with this blood curse all my life. I know how to guard against it, take care of myself. If you or anyone else were suddenly afflicted with it, you'd probably do something that would cause your death within the first twenty-four hours. You wouldn't be used to taking precautions against it.

"That's the difference between us. I avoid angles and sharp-edged or pointed things. I have my hair singed instead of clipped, my nails sandpapered instead of filed. I don't dance on waxed floors nor walk about my bedroom in carpet-slippers and so on.

"My father lived to fifty, my grandfather to sixty-four. Both had it. I have lived twenty-nine years with it. What is to prevent my living another twenty-nine? Another thing—she knows that so far, until now, she stands to inherit automatically, under Iverian law, in case of my death.

"She cannot be sure that tomorrow I will not give away my entire estate to charity or deed it to the state, a privilege which is mine—while I am still alive. She cannot afford to wait, as you think. It's a matter of days, of hours."

That did put a different slant on it. He was winning me over. But I still had to be sure. "In this setup you have outlined," I said, speaking slowly, "there's invitation enough to murder. But what actual proof have you that she intends doing so?"

"I thought you'd ask that as a police official," he smiled wryly. "I cannot give you phonograph records on which she says at the top of her voice, 'I will kill him!' I can only give you little things, which show the way the wind blows. Tiny, trifling things.

"Each in itself meaning nothing. But added to one another over a period of time they mean—murder. That's why I said I wanted to tell this to someone who was acutely perceptive, who does not need a brick wall to fall on his head before he senses something. Well, at random, here are some of these trifling things. And I am leaving out as many as I am recalling.

"When this Harrison first came back here from Europe he seemed very anxious to enjoy my company. He kept asking me to go out driving with them. Since they loved one another, I couldn't understand why he should be concerned with my being present.

"I unexpectedly agreed one day, simply to find out what it was about. At once a sort of tension came over the two of them. She quickly gave some lame excuse at the last moment, to get out of going with us. Apparently it was not part of their plan for her to endanger herself.

"I figured the route he would take, stepped back in the house a moment just as we were ready to leave and phoned ahead to a gas-station attendant that Marilyn and I both knew. When we reached there he was to tell Harrison there'd been a call for him—from a lady—and he was to wait there until she called back. He'd think it was Marilyn of course.

"The mechanic flagged us and Harrison fell for it. While he was in the office waiting, I said to the attendant, 'Check over this car thoroughly and find out what's the matter with it.' And I got out and

stood clear while he was doing it.

"He went over it quickly but expertly and when he got through he said, 'It's in fine condition, I can't find anything wrong with it.' Then he took his handful of waste and, from long habit, began polishing up the windshield. It fell through the frame intact and shattered all over the front seat, where I'd been until then. And it was not shatterproof glass.

"The little clamps that held it to the frame had all been unnoticeably loosened, so that any unusual pressure or impact— He would have braked abruptly somewhere along the way or grazed a tree or a wall or another car—just enough to give it that little shaking out.

"He would have been with me, of course. Maybe he would have even been more hurt than I was. He could afford a few bloody nicks and gashes. I couldn't. I went back to our place on foot and left him there in the office, still waiting for that non-existent call. I didn't say a word to her—simply that I was not used to being kept waiting at the roadside by anyone and had changed my mind. They couldn't tell if I knew or didn't know.

"But that gave him cold feet. He never came around again, I've never seen him since. I know he's lurking there unseen in the background, waiting for her to do the job and give him the all-clear signal. He may be reckless on the speedway, but he has no stomach for murder.

"All the remaining attempts have come from her. More trivial even than that, as befits the feminine genius. So subtle that—how shall I repeat them to you and make them sound like anything?"

"Let me be the judge," I murmured.

"The other night she attempted to embrace me, wound both arms about my neck. A caress, surely? But the gesture is false, has no meaning any more between us, so I quickly ward it off in the nick of time—for that reason alone. What death lurked in that innocent sign of affection?

"Then I notice a heavy slave bracelet, a bangle, that doesn't seem to close properly on her wrist. Its catch is defective, sticks up like a microscopic spur, needs flattening. What could it do to anyone else but graze them, inflict a tiny scratch. 'Ouch!' 'Oh, I'm sorry, dear, I'll kiss it away.' 'Forget it.'

"But to me it would have brought death. Strange, that only on the night she was wearing that particular ornament did she try to hug me tightly around the neck. The night before, and the night after, she didn't come near me."

He stopped and looked at me. "More?"

"A little more. I'll tell you when to stop."

"In a hundred ways she has tried to draw the single drop of blood from me that will eventually bring death in its wake. She introduced a cat into the house, a pedigreed Per-

sian. Yet I happen to know that she hates the animals herself. Why a cat then? I soon found out."

He shrugged. "You know the feline propensity for stalking and finally clawing, at anything moving? I sat reading one night before the fire, with the cat there, and finally dozed off, as she must have hoped I would sooner or later. I opened my eyes just in time to find the cat crouched at my feet, tail lashing warningly back and forth, about to spring.

"My arm was hanging down limp over the side of the chair. Its claws would have raked it in a half-dozen places. A loose piece of string was traveling up my arm, drawn from behind the chair. Luckily there was a cushion behind me. I just had time enough to swing it out in front of me, use it as a buffer. The cat struck it, gashed it to ribbons.

"When I stood up and turned, she was behind me, holding the other end of the string she had used to bait it. What could I say? 'You tried to kill me just then.' All she seemed to be doing was playing with the cat. Yet I knew she had tried; I knew she must have kept flinging out that piece of string again and again until it trailed across my arm as she wanted it to.

"Whom could I tell such a thing to—and expect to be believed? What bodyguard, what detective, can protect me against such methods?"

He was right about that. I could have sent someone back with him to protect him against a gun, a knife, poison. Not against a woman playing with a cat or twining her arms about his neck.

"Why don't you leave her, then? Why don't you get out while there is still time? Why stay and wait for it to happen?"

"We Iverias don't give up the things we prize that easily."

That left me kind of at a loss. Here was a man who knew he was going to be murdered, yet wouldn't lift his little finger to prevent it.

"Any more?"

"What's the use of going ahead? I have either already convinced you by the few samples I have given or else there's no hope of my ever convincing you."

"And now just what is it you want me to do?"

"Nothing. When it happens—maybe tomorrow, maybe next week—I will call you, while I still have the strength left, and say, 'This is it.' But even if I fail to, be sure that it is 'it.' You will read in the papers, within a day or two after that, that the Prince of Iveria died from haemophilia. Some slight mishap in the home. A pin had been left in his freshly laundered shirt, perhaps.

"There isn't a living soul in the whole world, physician or layman, who will believe such a thing *could* have been murder. But *you* will know better, Inspector Burke, *you* will know better after what I have told you today.

"Take my affidavit out of your safe, go up there and arrest her. Force the issue through, so that she has to stand trial for it. Probably she

will never be convicted. That doesn't matter. The thing will be brought out into the open, aired before the whole world. His name will be dragged into it. Convicted or acquitted, I will have succeeded in what I set out to do. *She cannot marry him* or go near him, after I am gone, without branding herself a murderess in the eyes of the whole world."

"So that's it," I said softly. "What a revenge!"

"That's it. He can't have her and she can't have him. Unless they are willing to go through a living hell, become outcasts, end by hating one another. In which case they have lost one another anyway. I am a Prince of Iveria. What once belonged to me I give up to no other man."

He'd said his say. He stood up and stretched out his hand to me.

"Good-by, Inspector Burke. We shall probably not see one another again. Your job is to punish murder. See that you don't fail. You'll do what I've asked you to?"

What could I do? Go up there and arrest her, to prevent it? On what charge? Wearing a bracelet with a catch that needed repairing? Playing with a pet cat in the same room he happened to be? True, he was almost seeking the thing instead of trying to ward it off. But I couldn't compel him to move out of his own home if he didn't want to. If murder was committed, even though he made no move to avoid it, even though he met it halfway, that didn't make it any the less murder.

He kept looking at me, waiting for my answer. I nodded gloomily at last, almost against my will.

"I'll do—whatever the situation calls for," I said.

He turned and went slowly out through the doorway with the aid of his cane, stiffly erect, just leaning a little sidewise. I never saw him alive again.

III

It came quicker than I'd expected it to. Too quickly for me to be able to do anything to prevent it. I'd intended paying a visit up there in person, trying to introduce myself into the establishment in some way, to see if I couldn't size up the situation at first hand, form my own conclusions.

He hadn't given me any *physical* evidence, remember, that she was attempting to murder him, only oral. All right, granting that he couldn't give me physical evidence, the very nature of the setup forbade it, he still hadn't convinced me a hundred percent. My own eyes and ears would have helped. But before I had a chance it was already too late, the thing was over.

The second day after his visit, at nine in the morning, just after I'd got in to Headquarters, I was hailed. "Inspector Burke, you're wanted on the phone."

I picked it up and a woman's voice, cool and crisp as lettuce, said, "Inspector Burke, this is the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital at Eastport.

We have a patient here, the Prince of Iveria, who would like to speak to you."

I waited, squeezing the life out of the phone. There were vague preparatory sounds at the other end. He must have been very weak already. I could hardly hear him at first. Just a raspy breathing sound, like dry leaves rustling around in the wind. They must have been holding him up to it.

I said, "I can't hear you!"

Then he got words through. Four of them. "Burke? This is it."

I said, "Hello! Hello!"

He'd hung up.

I called right back. I couldn't get him again. Just got the hospital switchboard. They wouldn't clear the call. The patient was in no condition to speak further to anyone, they told me. He was dying.

"You've got to put me through to him again! He was just on the line, so how can an extra thirty seconds hurt?"

Another wait. The hospital operator came back again. "The patient says there is nothing further to be said." *Click.*

If ever a man embraced death willingly, you might say exultingly, it was the prince.

I grabbed my hat, I grabbed a cab, I went straight out there to the hospital myself, then and there. Again the switchboard operator down on the main floor blocked me. She plugged in, then plugged out again.

"Sorry, no one can go up. The Prince of Iveria is in a coma, sinking fast. I'm afraid there's not much hope left."

That cooled me off. If he couldn't talk there wasn't much use going up. I said, "I'll wait," and hung around down there in the lobby for the next two hours, having her ring up at intervals to find out. There was always a chance he might rally. What I wanted to hear from him was—had she done it or not?

True, the implication of "This is it," implied she had. He'd warned me that was all he was going to say when the time came but I had to have more than that. Probably now the only material witness there would ever be against her was slipping through my fingers. I didn't have an intact nail left on my ten fingers, the marble flooring on my side of the reception foyer was swimming with cigaret butts, by the time the two hours were up. I must have driven the poor switchboard girl half crazy.

Twice, while I was waiting, I saw rather husky-looking individuals step out of the elevator. They were both too hale-looking to be hospital cases themselves. One was counting over a small wad of bills. The second one was hitching at his sleeve, as though his arm was tender. Without knowing for sure, I had a good hunch they were donors who had been called on to infuse their blood into him.

The operator tried his floor once more but he was still unconscious, so it looked as though it hadn't helped. Even my badge wouldn't have got me up—this was a hospital, after all

—but I didn't want to use it, in any event.

At ten to two that afternoon the elevator door opened and *she* came out—alone. I saw her for the first time. I knew it must be she. He'd said she was the most beautiful girl in Europe or America. He needn't have left out Asia or Africa. She was the most beautiful human being I'd ever seen anywhere in my entire life.

The sort of a face that goes with wings and a halo. She was all in black, but not the black of mourning—yet—the black of fashion. She wasn't crying, just looking down at the floor as if she had a lot to think about. So at least she was no hypocrite. I gave her that much.

As she moved through the foyer the nurse at the switchboard followed her with her eyes, a pair of question marks in them that couldn't be ignored. She—Iveria's wife—felt their insistence finally, looked over at her, nodded subduedly with a sort of calm sadness. About the same degree of melancholy introspection that would go with the withering away of a pet plant in one's garden, say, or the receipt of bad news from one's stockbroker.

So he'd died.

I didn't accost her, didn't do anything about it right then. She wasn't some fly-by-night roadhouse hostess that you grab while the grabbing's good. She would always be where I could reach her. The patrimony of the House of Iveria, immovably fixed in the ground in mines, farms, forests, castles, would see to that. If she'd done it, plenty of time. If she hadn't, more than plenty.

She went on out through the revolving door to a car waiting for her outside. Nobody else was in it but the driver. It skimmed away like a bolt of satin being unrolled along the asphalt.

The switchboard operator turned to me unnecessarily, and whispered, "He's dead."

It was up to me now. I was on my own. All I had was the valueless memory of a conversation, and an almost equally valueless affidavit, taken before the event itself. And my own eyes and ears and good judgment, whatever they were worth.

There had been a pyramidal hierarchy of medical experience in attendance on him, as was to be expected. But I didn't bother with the lower strata, took a short-cut straight to the apex and singled out the topmost man. I did it right then and there, as soon as I'd seen her leave the hospital.

His name was Drake and he'd treated everyone prominent who'd ever had it, which meant he got about one patient every ten years. And could live nicely on it, at that, to give you a rough idea.

I found him in a small pleasant retiring room reserved for the doctors on the hospital staff—it was a private institution after all—on the same floor Iveria had just died on, but well insulated from the hospital

activities that were milling around it.

He was having a glass of champagne-and-bitters and smoking a Turkish cigaret, to help him forget the long-drawn-out death scene he'd just attended. A radio, turned down almost to the point of inaudibility, was whispering away.

I didn't make the mistake of thinking this was heartlessness. I could tell it wasn't just by looking at him. He had a sensitive face and his hands were a little shaky. The loss of the patient had affected him, either professionally or personally or both.

He thought I was a reporter at first, and wasn't having any. "Please don't bother me right now. They'll give you all the necessary details down at the information desk." Then when he understood I was Police, he still couldn't understand why there should be any Police interest in the case. Which didn't surprise me. Whatever the thing was, I expected it to look natural—Iveria had warned me it would—so natural I might never be able to break it down.

I didn't give him an inkling what my real purpose was. "This isn't police interest in the usual sense," I glibly explained. "His Highness took me into his confidence shortly before this happened, asked me to have certain personal matters carried out for him in case of his death. That's my only interest."

That cleared away the obstructions. "Wait a minute, is your name Burke?" He put down his champagne glass alertly.

"That's right."

"He left a message for you. He revived for a moment or two shortly before the end, whispered something to us. The nurse and I jotted it down." He handed me a pencilled scrap of paper. "I don't know whether we got it right or not, it was very hard to hear him—"

It said on it—*Burke. Don't fail me. This is a job for you.*

Which was a covert way of saying murder. "Yes, you got it right," I said gloomily and put it in my pocket. "Was his wife present when he whispered this?"

"Not in the room itself, in the outside room."

"Did she see it afterwards?"

"No. He muttered something that sounded like 'Nobody but him,' so we took that to mean he didn't want anyone but yourself to see it."

"That's right, he didn't."

"Sit down. Have some?" I shook my head. "Swell fellow, wasn't he? Practically doomed from the beginning though. They always are with that. I tried five transfusions. I even tried this new cobra-venom treatment. Minute doses, of course. Very efficacious in some cases.

"Couldn't stop the flow this time, though. You see, that's the worst part of the hellish thing. It's progressive. Each time they're less able to resist than the time before. He was too weak by then really to be pulled through—"

He'd been under a strain and he was going to work it off in garru-

lousness if I didn't stop him, so I stopped him. I wasn't interested in the medical aspects of the case anyway. There was only one thing I wanted.

"What brought it on this time?" I asked.

"The lesions were all over his forehead and scalp. An unfortunate chain of trivialities led to an accident. They occupied adjoining bedrooms, you know. The communicating door was faced with a large pier glass, a mirror panel.

"There was a reading chair in Iveria's room with a large bulky hassock to go with it, on which he habitually rested his feet. There was a bedside light, which should have cast enough light to avoid what happened.

"At any rate, he was awakened from a sound sleep by his wife's voice crying out a name—evidently she was being troubled by a bad dream. There were such terror and grief in her voice, however, that he couldn't be sure it was just that and not an intruder. He seized a small revolver he habitually kept bedded under his pillow, drew the chain pull of the bedside light.

"It refused to go on—the bulb had evidently burned itself out unnoticed since the last time it had been in use. The switch controlling the main overhead lights was at the opposite side of the room, far out of reach. He therefore jumped up without any lights, made for the mirror door by his sense of direction alone, gun in hand. The reading chair and hassock should have been far offside.

"The chair still was. The hassock had become misplaced, was directly in his path. It threw him. There was not enough space between it and the mirror-faced door to give the length of his prostrate body clearance. His forehead struck the mirror, shattered it. It was only a thin sheeting after all.

"It would have been a serious accident with anyone. It would not have been a fatal accident with anyone else. None of the numerous little gashes was deep enough to require stitches. But he and his wife both knew what it meant. They didn't waste any time. She telephoned me in Montreal, where I was attending a medical convention, and I chartered a plane and flew right back here.

"But I doubt that I could have saved him even if I had been right in the same room with him when it happened. I had them remove him to the hospital and summon donors before I even started down. I gave him the first transfusion ten minutes after I arrived but he failed to rally, continued sinking steadily. Actually, there was very little I or anyone else could have done."

I wasn't interested in the rest, only in what the original "mishap," the starting point, had been. I thanked him and left. This was going to be a tricky thing to sift to the bottom, if there was one. Acutely perceptive? You needed to be a magnetized divining rod to know what to do!

IV

I opened the safe and read over his affidavit before I went out there to tackle her. The affidavit didn't bring anything new to bear on the case, simply restated what he had said to me that day in the office, only at greater length and more detail. The incident of the loosened windshield was there, the cat incident and several others that he hadn't told me at the time.

> *. . . I therefore, in view of the above, solemnly accuse my wife, Marilyn Reid d'Iveria, of having at various times sought to cause my death, by means of the affliction known to her to be visited upon me and of continuing to seek to do so at the time this deposition is taken. Charge the authorities and all concerned that in case of my death occurring at any time hereafter during her continued presence in my house and proximity to me, to apprehend and detain the said Marilyn Reid d'Iveria with a view to inquiring into and ascertaining her responsibility and guilt for the aforesaid death, and of bringing just punishment upon her.*
>
> *Arnoldo Amadeo Manfredo d'Iveria*

With that final postcript tacked on it was going to be damned effective. Plenty enough to arrest her on, book her for suspicion of murder, hold her for trial. What went on after that, in the courtroom, was none of my business. I was a detective, not a lawyer.

I put it in my pocket and left to interview the party of the second part—the murderess.

He'd been buried in the morning—privately—and I got out there about five that same afternoon. There was no question of an arrest yet, not on this first visit anyway, so I didn't bother looking up the locals, even though I was out of jurisdiction here. She could slam the door in my face if she wanted. She wouldn't if she was smart. It wouldn't help her case any.

It was a much smaller place than I'd expected. White stucco or sandstone or something—I'm not up on those things. I turned in along the driveway on foot. It was dusk by now and a couple of the ground-floor windows around on the side were lighted, the rest of the house was blacked out.

There was a high-powered knee-high foreign car outside the entrance. It wasn't the one she had driven away from the hospital in. It looked like the kind of a job would belong to a professional auto racer—if he could afford it.

I whistled soundlessly, thought, "Whew! Already?" It was almost too good to be true. Maybe this case wasn't going to be such a tough baby to crack after all. One sure thing, she was writing herself up a bad press if things ever got as far as a jury, by doing this sort of thing. They should have at least let Iveria cool off overnight before they got together.

It was probably the sight of the car that kept me from ringing for

admittance right away, sent me on a little cursory scouting expedition around to the side those lighted windows were on. She'd probably be sitting there all in black, trying to look sorrowful, with him holding her hand, trying to look consoling, and each one of them knowing the other was a liar.

When I got in line with them I moved in close enough for what was behind the gauze, or whatever it was backing them, to come into focus. Just close enough, no closer. trying to take a little of the ignominy out of snooping like that, I suppose. Then I stood stockstill there on the well-kept lawn. I couldn't believe what I saw.

It was her, all right. She was dancing around the room without a partner. The way you do when you're overjoyed, can't contain yourself. Arms stretched out wide in a gesture of release, waltzing or at least swaying around. She was in a light tan dress, and it billowed out all around her as she whirled like a ballerina.

He was sitting there, watching her. I got my first look at him. He was dark-haired and broad-shouldered, that was about all I could tell from where I was. I couldn't see much to him, just something to hang a Stetson on.

Iveria's words came back to me — "What is there about boxers, plane pilots, auto racers, makes women lose their heads?" He was holding his head cocked at a slight angle with an air of proud ownership, as if to say, "Isn't she lovely? Isn't she cute?" To which my own commentary would have *been*— "She's the cutest little murderess I've seen in an age."

If this was how she was the very afternoon of the day he'd been buried I couldn't help wondering what she would be like a week—or a month—afterwards. Probably eating picnic lunches on his grave. Why, there was no difficulty about this case, it was a pushover.

I was only sorry I hadn't brought out a warrant with me, made arrangements with the Eastport locals and got it over with then and there. Whether the crime could ever be proved or not was beside the point. She was begging for arrest if anyone ever was, just on grounds of public decency.

I strode around to the front and rang—peremptorily. A maid opened the door. I said, "I want to see the Princess or whatever she calls herself."

She'd received her orders ahead of time. "She's not at home to anyone—"

I elbowed her aside without another word and walked down the hall to where they were. The open doorway of the room cut an orange notch across the corridor and I turned right at it.

She'd just finished her solo dancing. She'd come to a stop before him but her filmy tan skirt was still swinging around from before. She was leaning her face down toward him, a hand resting on either arm of

his chair. Their lips were only inches apart and in another minute—

I just stood there taking it in. Did I say she was beautiful before? Double it in spades and you're still short-suited. I couldn't understand why nature should go to town so all over one face and let the others all go hang.

She became aware of me, shot up and backed like something released from a bowstring. He reared his head and turned and looked at me, around the back of his chair. She said, "Who're you?" with a sort of unintentional matter-of-factness, that came from not raising her voice high enough to suit the situation.

"Sorry to intrude," I said. "I've come out here to see you. You're d'Iveria's widow, I believe?" I eyed the light-tan dress she had on meaningly.

"Yes but people don't just walk in here—" She made an abortive gesture toward some service push-button or other.

"That won't do any good," I said. "I came here to have a talk with you and I'm having it."

The Harrison fellow got up at this point, ready to take part in the matter. He was taller than I'd thought. He must have had a hard time tucking away those legs under a racing-car hood. He was just a kid, really—a kid of about twenty-seven. He was pretty clean-cut-looking, too, for a—well, call it home-wrecker or whatever you want. I was surprised. He looked like he drank milk with his meals and, when he wanted to paint the town red, went to a movie with a bag of salted peanuts in his pocket.

He started toward me, biting off something about, "You'll have the talk when she's ready, and not when you feel like it."

Suddenly something made her change her mind. Some second look at me or more likely some unspoken thought in her own mind. She wanted the talk right away, it couldn't come fast enough. But without him—she didn't want him to have any part in it, you could see that. Her arm shot out before him, barring his way.

"Don't, Streak," she said. "I think I know what this is. You go now, will you? Call me later." And then to me, almost pleadingly, "It's myself you want to speak to, isn't it? Not the two of us. It's all right if—if he goes now, isn't it?"

"Yourself'll do nicely," I said.

Harrison, who wasn't very alert at grasping nuances, couldn't get off anything better than: "Well, but—"

She went into high gear, edging and propelling him toward the room door. She kept throwing me appealing looks, begging me to keep quiet just a minute longer until she could get him out of the way. At least, that was the way I translated them. I couldn't be sure.

Meanwhile she was almost crowding him out into the hall before her, saying disconnectedly, "You go

now. I know what this is. It's all right—it's nothing. Call me later. About ten?"

The only way I could figure it was, either she wanted to hang onto his good opinion of her as long as she could or she wanted to keep him in the clear and, ostrich-like, thought that by getting him out of here that would do it.

Or she thought she could handle me better if he wasn't around to cramp her style. One thing was plain, she already knew what was coming. And if she wasn't guilty, how the hell could she have known? How should such an idea ever enter her head?

I let him go. It made the issue more clear-cut just to deal with her alone. He hadn't been in the picture at all since the windshield incident, according to d'Iveria's own affidavit. I could always get him later anyway.

The last thing I heard her say, when she got him as far as the front door, was, "Get home all right. Don't drive too fast, Streak, I'm always so worried about those intersections along the way." That was sure love, to be able to think of such a thing at such a time. Well, I suppose even murderesses love someone.

She didn't come right back to the room. Called, "I'll be right with you, officer!" and then ran up the stairs before I could get out there and stop her. By the time I did she was already making the return trip. She hadn't been up there long enough to do any damage. She was holding some sort of small black folder in her hand, I couldn't quite make out what it was, except that it was no weapon of any sort.

We went back into the room where they had been originally. She was breathing rapidly from the energy she'd used in maneuvering him to the door and then running the stairs—or maybe it was from some other cause entirely. I don't know. People's breathing quickens from repressed fear too.

She began with beautiful directness. "I know what you're going to say. I wanted to get him out of here before you said it. He would have come to blows with you and got in trouble. I can handle it more tactfully. You're going to say I killed Arnold, aren't you? You're the police, aren't you?

"Only a detective would crash into a room like you did just now. I suppose you looked through the windows first and saw me dancing, because I was happy he was gone. Well, if you didn't, that's what I was doing just before you got here, so now you know anyway. May I see your credentials?"

I showed her my badge.

"I knew he was going to do this to me," she said. "Yes, I'm not wearing black. Yes, I'm glad he's gone—like a prisoner when his term is up." She had opened the little black folder while she was speaking, torn out a light-blue tab. She was writing something on it. "Do you mind giving me your name?" she

said quietly, without looking up.

"The name is Nothing-doing-on-that-stuff." I hitched the light-blue tab out from under the midget gold fountain pen she had point-down on it, so that the last zero—there were three after the one—streaked off in a long diagonal ink line across the face of it. "Keep it up," I said. "You're saving some lawyer lots of hard work." I put it in my pocket —the blank check had Iveria's name printed across one edge in lieu of written endorsement, so it was as incriminating as if she'd signed it.

"Then there's nothing I can do or say that will—avert this thing, this thing that he wanted to happen to me?"

"Not along those lines. What you can do for the present is sit down quietly a minute and answer a question or two about your husband's death. Would you mind giving me the exact circumstances, in your own words?"

She calmed herself with a visible effort, sat down, lit a cigaret and then forgot to smoke it. "I was asleep—"

"Do you recall having an unpleasant dream that caused you to cry out?"

She smiled. "One often doesn't, even if one did. The unpleasant dream, in my case, was during my waking hours, you see—"

"Trying to gain my sympathy," I thought warily, and said, "That has nothing to do with it. Please go on."

"I heard a breaking sound that waked me. I lit the light. I saw the communicating door move slowly inward and his hand trail after it on the knob, to gain my help. It opened inward, and he kept it locked on his side"—her eyelids dropped—"as if afraid of me at nights.

"I found him attempting to pick himself up in a welter of glass shards. I saw a gun there on the floor behind him that had spiralled from his hand when he fell. I took it into my own room and hid it in my dressing table."

"Why?"

"We both knew he was doomed instantly. I was afraid that to avoid the pain, the lingering death that was a certainty, he would take a quicker way out."

"Which would not look quite so much like an accident? That's the whole sum and substance of the matter?"

"That's the whole sum and substance."

"May I see this room it happened in?"

"Of course."

I followed her up the stairs. "The local authorities have already examined it?"

"The local authorities have already examined it."

I looked at her, meaning, "You didn't have much trouble convincing *them*, did you?" She understood the look, she dropped her eyes.

V

The only vestiges remaining of the "accident" were the spokes of emptiness slashed out of the mirror

panel, in sun-ray formation. His head had struck it low. The upper two-thirds were still intact. The inclined reading chair was far out of the way, a good two to three yards offside. The hassock sat directly before it, where it belonged.

"Is this the habitual position of this chair?"

But I didn't really have to ask her that. The carpet was a soft plush that showed every mark; the chair had stood there a long time, its four supports had etched deep ineradicable indentations into the nap where it now was. This was a mark against, not for her. How should a bulky thing like that hassock travel three yards out from where it belonged—unaided?

I asked her that.

"I don't know," she said with an air of resigned hopelessness. "Unless he may have kicked it away from him in getting up from the chair to go to bed."

I sat down in it, arched my legs to the hassock. I had to try it three times, myself, before I could land it all the way out in a line with the mirror door. And I had stronger leg muscles than he—he'd had to walk with a cane. Still, he *could* have done it in a burst of peevishness or boredom.

I looked the bedside light over next. It was just a stick with a bulb screwed in at the top and a shade clamped over that. I hitched the chain-pull. The bulb stayed dark.

"How is it he would not have noticed this bulb was defective before getting into bed?" I wondered aloud for her benefit. "Isn't that what bedside lights are for, to be left on until the last?" The wall-switch controlling the overheads was all the way across the room, beside the door leading out to the hall.

"I don't know, maybe he did." She shrugged with that same listless manner as before. "What would he want a new bulb for at that hour if he was on the point of retiring for the night? He would have had to go downstairs for it himself—the help were all in bed by then. Or perhaps it was still in working order up to the time he turned it off. Bulbs have been known to expire passively between the time they were last used and the next time they are turned on."

I removed the clamped shade. I tested the pear-shaped thing gingerly. It vibrated slightly beneath my fingertips, I thought. I gave it a turn or two to the right. It responded. There should have been no give there if it was fastened as tightly into the socket as it would go. Brilliant light suddenly flooded it.

The bulb was in perfectly good condition—it had simply been given a half-turn or two to the left, sufficient to break the current.

I looked at her, keeping my hand still on it for as long as I could stand the increasing heat. Her eyes had dropped long before then.

"You say the communicating door was kept locked. Was the out-

side door to the hall also kept locked by your husband?"

"I believe it was," she said lifelessly. "I believe the butler, in whom my husband had the greatest confidence, used a special key to let himself in in the mornings. We were—rather a strange household."

I noticed an old-fashioned bell-pull there by the bed. I reached for it. She stopped me with a quick little gesture. "I can give you the answer to what you are about to ask him, right now, myself. It will save time. He forgot his key that night, left it standing in the outside lock of the door, after he had concluded his duties for the night and left my husband. I noticed it there myself and returned it to him the next day."

"Then anyone else in the house could—"

She wouldn't let me finish. "Yes, anyone else in the house could have entered my husband's room after he had gone to sleep. To do what—give a bulb a half-turn so it wouldn't light—shift a hassock out of place? Don't you think that would have been a foolish misuse of such an opportunity?"

"No I don't!" I crackled at her. I couldn't have made it more emphatic if I'd tried. "If a knife had been left sticking in him or a fine wire tightened around his throat, that would have been murder. But he died of an 'accident.' One little mishap led to another as inevitably as in a Rube Goldberg invention." I drove the point home viciously. "You and I are agreed on that, he died of an 'accident!' " I dropped my voice. "And I'm here to find out who caused it."

She twined and untwined her fingers a few times. "And I cannot defend myself," she shuddered. "It is not that the charge is so hard to prove—it's that it's so hard to disprove. This is what he intended to happen. I saw the smile on his face, even when I first found him lying there in the litter of glass—as if to say, 'This time I've got you.'

"I beg of you to do this much at least. Send for the maid that cleans this room. Don't ask her any questions about the bedside light, just test her. Just—well, let me do it, may I?"

I nodded, more on guard than ever. She hitched the bell-pull a certain number of times, had me replace the lampshade, lit a cigaret and flicked ashes onto it.

Within a few minutes a maid appeared, not the same one who had admitted me to the house originally.

"Will you dust off this little bedside light?" Iveria's wife said casually. "Don't take extra pains, just do it as you would ordinarily." I noticed her wrists were both trembling slightly.

The girl took a cloth from her waistband, took a swipe around the stick part. Then she began to swivel the cloth around the shade. She was left handed, she moved the cloth from right to left. Not only that, but she held the little appliance by the stick to steady it, so that the

shade was not held fast at all, began to slip unnoticeably around a little under her ministrations. And the wire cleats that gripped the bulb moved with it of course, turning the bulb a little in its socket.

"That will do." The girl stepped back. Iveria's wife said to me, "Try it now."

I jerked the chain-pull. The bulb failed to light up.

She looked at me animatedly, hopefully.

"Very interesting," I said drily. "You were pretty sure it would happen just that way, though, weren't you?"

I saw the hopefulness ebb out of her face little by little; her former listless resignation came back. "Oh, I see," she said quietly, "I'm supposed to have rehearsed her to do it just that way—"

She stood up, smiling wanly. "Will you excuse me for a moment? You'll want to question her alone, I'm sure. And even if she tells you I haven't coached her about this lamp at all, you won't believe I didn't anyway. There isn't really anything I can do or say. Arnold has won—he won in life, and now he's won in death."

She opened the marred mirror panel, stepped through to her own room, closed it behind her.

I said to the maid, "Do you always dust off lamps that vigorously?"

She looked undecided for a moment, finally snickered, confessed, "Only when someone's around to see. When no one's around—" She flicked the edge of her cloth at the lampshade and back to show me.

"Tell Mrs. Iveria I'd like to see her again, if she doesn't mind." The girl opened the door, went in there after her, closed it again.

I frowned. Every new fact that appeared on one side of the ledger, brought its corrollary with it on the opposite side. To a chartered accountant it might have been heaven, to a detective it was hell.

I wondered why she was taking so long to come out. I crossed to the mirror, threw it open without waiting, even though it led to a lady's room. You couldn't knock on the thing any more without risking bringing the rest of the glass down out of its frame.

I didn't see them for a minute—they were over on the side of the room screened by the door, engaged in a breathless, utterly silent almost motionless hand-to-hand deadlock over a winking little gun—I suppose the one she had taken from him the night of the accident.

I jumped in at them, caught the wrist holding it, turned the skin cruelly around. She dropped it and I caught it in my open palm. The maid stepped back, began to snivel.

I said, "Why didn't you call me, you little fool!"

"I did call you," she snuffled. "Pity you wouldn't come in and find out what was the matter!"

I pocketed the revolver, said to the girl, "We don't need you any more."

And to Iveria's wife, "Come on downstairs." She followed me, white as a ghost but calm now once more.

"Do we go now?" she asked at the foot of the stairs.

"You don't suppose I'm going to leave you behind me out here, after what you just tried to do."

"That was a momentary impulse. It won't happen again. It wouldn't be fair to Streak, I see that now. It would be giving Arnold his victory too cheaply."

We'd gone back to the room in which I'd first spoken to her.

"Sit down," I said. "Give yourself time to quiet down first."

She looked at me hopelessly. "Is there anything I can do or say that will make you believe me? I had nothing to do with Arnold's death."

I didn't answer—which was answer enough.

"I don't suppose you believe that, do you?" I didn't answer. "You're positive that I meant to kill Arnold, aren't you?" I didn't answer. "He saw to it that you would be. He went to you and told you the story, didn't he? Told it his way."

I didn't see any point in denying that—it was self-evident, by the mere fact of my being here. "Yes, he did."

She let her head slowly droop forward, as if in admission of irretrievable defeat. But then she raised it again a moment afterwards, refusing the admission.

"May I have the same privilege? May I tell the *same* story my way?"

"You're going to have that privilege anyway when the time comes."

"But don't you see it'll be too late by then? Don't you see this is a special case? The mere accusation in itself is tantamount to a conviction. One wisp of smoke, and the damage has been done. Streak and I can never live it down again—not if every court in the land finds insufficient evidence to convict us. That's what he wanted, don't you see? To blast the two of us—"

"But I'm just a detective; I'm not a judge or State's attorney."

"But he only told it to *you*, no one else at the time."

This did get a rise out of me. "How do you know that?" I said sharply.

"Dr. Drake showed me the dying message he had them take down. It had your name on it—*Burke*—it was addressed to you personally, no one else. It was easy to see he'd made you the sole repository of his confidences, until the time came to shout the charges from the rooftops. The evidence was too nebulous—there was no other way in which to do it."

"Tell it then," I said.

VI

She didn't thank me or brighten up—she seemed to know it would be hopeless ahead of time. She smiled wanly.

"I'm sure the external details are going to be the same. He was far too clever to have changed them. He selected and presented each and every one of them so that I cannot deny them—on a witness stand, for instance—unless I perjure

myself. It's their inner meaning that he distorted.

I just sat and waited, non-committal. I'd been through this once before. Now I was going to get it a second time.

"I met Arnold in St. Moritz and I felt vaguely sorry for him. Pity is a dangerous thing—you so often mistake it for love. No one told me what was the matter with him."

Here was the first discrepancy.

"He proposed to me by letter, although we were both at the same resort. He used the word 'haemophilia,' said he knew he had no right to ask me to be his wife. I'm not a medical student. I thought it was some minor thing, like low blood pressure or anemia.

"I wrote back, using the strange word myself. I said it didn't matter, that I thought enough of him to marry him in good health or poor.

"By the time I actually found out it was too late. That was all right. But then I met Streak and —I found out my heart was still single. I went to Arnold and I said, 'Now let me go.' He just smiled.

"You don't know what torture really is, the mental kind. You may have beaten up suspects at times. You don't know what it is to have someone hiss at you three times a day, 'You wish I was dead, don't you?' Until finally you *do* wish they were dead.

"We didn't want a cheap undercover affair. If that was all we'd wanted it could have been arranged. I wanted to be Streak's wife.

"Finally I couldn't stand it any more. I said, 'It would be so easy —why should we go on letting him do this to us?' Streak said, 'Don't talk that way. We don't want to get together by building a bridge over someone's dead body.' Streak's out of this entirely."

Which didn't prove a thing, except how much she loved him.

"They say the female of the species is more deadly than the male. I toyed with the idea. I let it grow on me. Finally it took hold, became decision. Arnold wouldn't give me a chance to change my mind, he kept it at boiling point himself.

"Streak came around in his car, to see if he couldn't win Arnold over by having a man-to-man talk with him alone. I knew he didn't have a chance, I knew what a venomous, diseased mind he was up against. *I* was the one who loosened the clamps on that windshield with a little screw-driver. But it missed fire.

"I tried in one or two other ways. And then suddenly I came back to my senses. Dead, he would keep me and Streak apart far more effectively than he had when he was alive.

"It's ironic, isn't it? When I wanted to kill him, nothing I tried would work. Then, after I'd stopped trying, he goes off"—she snapped her thumbnail—"like that!"

I said, "D'you realize what you've admitted? That you actually *did* try to murder him several times without succeeding. And now you want me to believe that this last time, that

finally did succeed, it wasn't you but an accident!"

"Yes, you've got to—because it's true! What I've told you is *all* truth and I want you to believe it. I did intend killing him, I did try. I changed my mind.

"All right, now you've heard my side of it, as well as his. Think well what you're doing, because there's no undoing it."

"Suppose I go back to town now without doing anything—for the present. What will you do?"

"Wait here—hoping, praying a little—until I hear from you."

"How do I know that?"

"Where can I go? Running away won't help—it'll just fasten guilt on me. It'll just bring on the ignominy *he* wanted Streak and me to suffer, all the faster."

She was right about that, of course. I speared my finger at her. "Then wait here in this house until you hear from me. Consider yourself in the custody of your own conscience. I'm going back to town now, alone. I want to think this whole thing out—by myself, away from here. I can't think clearly when I'm this close to you."

"It's going to be awful," she said, "to have it hang suspended over my head like that. Will it be very long before I know?"

"As soon as I know myself. Don't leave the house. If the doorbell rings, and you see me standing out there you'll know I've come to take you back to face a charge of murder. If the telephone rings—that means you're in the clear."

Crawley looked in at me at midnight, said, "What's the matter—haven't you any home?"

I motioned him on his way. "I'm trying to think something out."

I had the deposition on the table in front of me, and the cigaret case, and the death-bed note he'd left for me. It all balanced so damnably even, his side and hers. Check and double-check—which was the true, which the false?

I finally reached an answer. Even though the scales remained as evenly balanced and counterbalanced as ever, to the last hairbreadth milligram. One little grain more had fallen on one side than on the other, I found when I'd ended my review.

At this point, right upon the brink of the solution to Inspector Burke's dilemma, we are halting the story in order to give you, the reader, a chance to match wits with Burke. You have at your disposal every fact and factor upon which the Inspector based his decision.

In case the puzzle seems too difficult we shall offer one further clue. The reason upon which Burke based his final action lies in the Princess' bedroom, surely a charmingly intimate place for such a vital item. So if you are not quite sure of the Inspector's course, you might check back to this scene in the story.

Then turn to page 156 for the final answer and see if you are right.

murder strikes in lychgate

by . . . . . Sax Rohmer

Bimbâshi Barûk meets a mystery, scents a crime and uncovers the naked tragedy of a woman's heart.

BIMBÂSHI BARÛK'S uneasy spirit was forever leading him into dark places, and this fact is illustrated well by the strange affair at Lychgate. Indeed, those mysterious circumstances which attended the death of Major de Maura might never have been explained, nor the true story of why the White Hart on Lychgate Heath became so uncomfortably crowded one night in September never have been told, if two men who had nothing to do with the matter had not chanced to meet there.

On the night in question a man who wore a rough tweed suit and carried an ash stick made his way into the bar. He was deeply tanned and his rather sleepy eyes looked almost startlingly blue in their dark setting. Immediately inside the door he paused for a moment, surprised by a fog of tobacco smoke and boom of conversation created by an unusual number of customers who crowded the place. He derived an impression that his entrance had caused a sudden lull, that many glances were directed upon him, but that apparently he was not the person looked for.

Joe Porter, the landlord, beckoned to him and, "Would you care to step into the Sergeants' Mess, sir?" he suggested. "It's getting

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Arthur Sarsfield Ward, to give Sax Rohmer his right name, doesn't really hate Asia, despite the dry-ice malevolence of his famous invention, the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu. To prove his liking for the East Rohmer has here created an Oriental detective whose human insight, plus a sixth sense, solves a mystery that baffles New Scotland Yard via a pluperfect diversion of interest.

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pretty fuggy out here in the bar."

The Sergeant's Mess was a tiny coffee room in which might be seen a print of "Ye White Harte, Lychgate Heath, 1743," and another of the fight between Sayers and Heenan, while over the mantel was displayed a stuffed mongoose in a glass case.

This sanctum gained and two pints being served, the customer asked, "What exactly has happened? Have you got a Lodge of the Ancient Order of Foresters or what?"

"Not at all, sir. It's clean beyond me. That crowd out there are shoemakers."

"Shoemakers?"

"Yes. There's over twenty of 'em."

"But why have they all decided to come here tonight?"

Joe Porter took up a copy of the *County Mirror* and indicated a paragraph. This was the paragraph:

> TO COBBLERS AND WORKING SHOEMAKERS
>
> A Cobbling match for the Champion's Cup and a purse of One Hundred Pounds. Entries between 9 and 9:30 P.M. on Thursday September the eighteenth at the White Hart, Lychgate Heath.

"That's the explanation," said Joe Porter. "It's filled my house with cobblers from miles around. Even old Jerry Stickle is here tonight. Won't go out after dark for nobody as a rule. Not," he added, "as anybody's going to work overtime to persuade him."

"H'm," murmured the visitor. "Queer business. Practical joke?"

"I suppose so. Anyway, nobody's come forward to explain it."

Voices from the bar grew louder at this moment, and Joe Porter raised the hatch so that the man in tweeds, looking through, could both see and hear the disputants.

"What I says is," remarked one who had a voice like a macaw, "and I says it firm, is this—who done it?"

The speaker was a small man whose triumphantly bald crown had cast out the last invader, so that his retreating but unconquerable hair had dug itself in lower down. Here it had resumed the offensive in the form of a vigorous and violent red beard. He wore spectacles with uncommonly thick rims, was attired in riding breeches, green stockings and a sort of khaki tunic, while his shoes had been built for alpine occasions. On his back he carried a steel helmet and a gasmask.

"There's twenty-four of us here," he announced, "includin' six from Uphill. I have been a-countin' of 'em."

A heated dispute thereupon arising, Joe Porter excused himself and went to restore order. As he retired by way of one door, a customer entered by the other. He was a big blond man with that in his bearing which suggested the soldier.

"B.B., by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were on Afric's burning shore!"

"So I was ten days ago." B.B. sprang up, a light of welcome in his

eyes. "But I have established an unfortunate reputation as a Bow Street runner or something. So now I'm back in England. Delighted to see you, Colonel."

Colonel Dawney, commandant of a military hospital in the neighborhood, smiled into the blue eyes of Bimbâshi Barûk. Although still young, Mohammed Ibrahîm Brian Barûk of the Camel Corps had—entirely contrary to his wishes—become an almost legendary figure among those who served with him in Africa.

"You haven't looked me up," said Dawney, as Joe Porter's face appeared behind the hatch. "I sometimes drop in here, because it's the only pub I know where one can get a decent glass of beer."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Joe. "Two pints?"

"I didn't know you were here," the bimbâshi replied. "I am billeted on some worthy people out Kinton way, where I share a small bedroom with a large bust of W. E. Gladstone which frightens me."

"You look fit," commented the medical officer, running an appraising glance over Barûk's spare, athletic figure. "Quite recovered from that nasty one you stopped in Libya?"

"Quite. In fact, I think it did me good to let some daylight into my dark interior."

"Well—what about dining with me tomorrow night?"

And so this was arranged, as Joe Porter's parade-ground tones reached them, "Final orders, please!" But when at closing time, four and twenty cobblers reluctantly faced the blackness of Lychgate Heath, they did not disperse until Sam Jollet, the constable, had pointed out that they were creating a public disturbance.

Following quite a sound dinner, Colonel Dawney and Bimbâshi Barûk were lingering over excellent port—the colonel was a connoisseur—when an urgent phone message called the colonel away to one of the wards. The bimbâshi emptied his glass—he didn't care for port, even when it was super—and filled his pipe. He was lounging in an armchair-island surrounded by a sea of tobacco smoke when Dawney returned.

"Sorry to leave you, B.B. It was that chap I mentioned—Major de Maura. Came in at eight and now it's"—he glanced at his watch—"nine forty-one."

"Well?"

"Finished. He's gone."

"Sorry. Very sudden, surely?"

"Yes." Colonel Dawney helped himself to a stiff brandy and soda; he was clearly upset, because he failed to note that his guest was not drinking. "Heart, I think, at the end. Phew! I'm bothered."

"Let me see, Dawney. This was the man who was working as a linguist for the War Office people on the Hill. Born in the Argentine, you said, and had served in Morocco and elsewhere?"

"That's the fellow. Unique at

languages, they say. He was billeted at the house of a Mrs. Saunders near Hayland Common. She called the police when he was seized with this attack. The M.O. on duty diagnosed tetanus, but it was difficult to see how it had occurred. They found a small scar, certainly, on the side of his calf—probably caused by brambles—healed and unlikely to have led to such violent infection. There was also, I should add, a tiny pinprick, quite recent, on his right forefinger. A thorn, again, might have done it.

"From what little I have learned—believe I told you—I gather that de Maura was by way of being a Don Juan. Normally, I should say he was a good-looker of his type. Lorkin, the medical officer who went to collect him, didn't like his heart. He picked up some story from Mrs. Saunders about a woman who used to visit him secretly. However, that's neither here nor there. It appears that a phone message came through for him—female voice, foreign accent—just before they called me."

He drew out a slip of paper.

"It was taken by the orderly on duty and sent up to the ward. You see, the patient's mind was clear at intervals, although his tongue was paralyzed. They decided to read the message out to him. Here it is, as the orderly wrote it down"—and he passed the chit across.

Bimbâshi Barûk read the following words aloud—"Please tell Major Rafael de Maura that Gabriel Varez is with him in spirit."

"Did he seem to understand it?"

The colonel nodded—it was an eloquent nod. "He forced himself upright in bed—and he spoke for the first and the last time—"

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'My shoes—' "

"My shoes?"

"Just that. Then came the final seizure—and his heart suddenly conked out."

Dawney suddenly observed that Bimbâshi Barûk was not drinking. He became conscience-stricken.

There was an interval of silence. Bimbâshi Barûk watched a daddy longlegs bent upon committing hara-kiri in a port glass. He possessed a sort of extra sense which, but only at odd times, enabled him to read from a man's eyes what that man was thinking. Such a message had just reached him from Dawney. It was this—"I believe Major de Maura was murdered."

"I take it"—the bimbâshi seemed to be thinking aloud—"that the message and its strange effect gave you the idea that there had been foul play?"

Colonel Dawney stared. "I don't know how you knew, but you're right. It startled the poor devil like an electric shock, with the queer result I have mentioned. I assume his reaction to have been one of urgency—a sudden, uncontrollable desire to get away, presumably from Gabriel Varez. Hence his words, 'My shoes.' "

"Was he undressed?"

"Yes—they found him in bed. But my idea wasn't based on the

message entirely. Charlton—he's one of the M.O.'s here—came on duty soon after de Maura died. It was he who phoned me just now. Charlton spent some years in South America—and although I'm inclined to think that the patient's nationality and the mysterious message inspired his theory, Charlton insists that de Maura didn't die of tetanus at all—"

"What's that?" Bimbâshi Barûk's sleepy blue eyes woke up. "Then of what did he die?"

"According to Charlton, of curare poisoning."

"Curare poisoning?"

"I have never come across a case myself but I understand that the symptoms are similar, except that the onset is sudden and the end more swift. A mere touch, of course, is sufficient to do the trick with curare—and there was that tiny pinprick on his finger. Point is, B.B., that if it was, as Charlton believes, curare, the case goes very deep indeed."

"What is curare? Is it something one can buy at a druggist's?"

Colonel Dawney laughed. He had ingrowing laughter, silent but evidently very painful.

"Don't be a fool. It's an alkaloid found in the extract of some South American tree and principally used as an arrow poison. Next to unobtainable."

"That fact rather narrows down the inquiry, don't you think? I mean, in order of importance, I should look for one, definite evidence that curare was used—two, somebody who had some or who could obtain it—three, de Maura's secret visitor—and four, Gabriel Varez. Either three or four, or possibly both, might prove to be two."

"H'm—lucid reasoning, I admit."

"If you really think that there's anything underlying this business, I should be glad, if it would relieve your mind, I mean, to look into it."

Colonel Dawney smiled his gratitude.

"Thanks, B.B. I should naturally have hesitated to suggest such a thing; but—I'll have Mrs. Saunders called up."

Major de Maura's apartments formed a suite, accessible from a side entrance. The sitting room offered no useful evidence. Mrs. Saunders, a hushed little woman who looked fragile, the bimbâshi had dismissed from the inquiry, although, if one were to accept as authentic a spacious and gaily colored photograph of the late Mr. Saunders which hung above a bureau, her survival became a minor mystery.

It exhibited a gentleman who wore a well-nourished but angry mustache and a Masonic apron, a gentleman whose hypnotic glare would have frightened anyone to death, the bambâshi thought, with the possible exception of W. E. Gladstone. A row of textbooks in English, French, German and Spanish lay on the bureau. The bimbâshi glanced at them and went into the bedroom. This he found in wild dis-

order with bedclothes strewn all about the floor.

There were few tasks he liked less than that of taking stock of another man's private possessions, made pathetic and in a sense sacred by the seal of death. It approached sheer indecency. But he went on with it and presently found himself considering a parade of shoes, lined up two-deep in a cupboard. Clearly Major de Maura had been a shoe fancier. He counted ten pairs. Another pair lay under a chair beside the bed and near by he saw some red Persian slippers.

For a long time Bimbâshi Barûk considered the rows of shoes, wondering in what way they differed from other shoes. They were unusually small, certainly, but it was not until he picked one up and compared it with his own that he grasped the real difference. The heels were almost an inch higher than normal. De Maura, a man below average height, had been anxious to add to his stature.

Nearly an hour elapsed before Bimbâshi Barûk came downstairs and bade Mrs. Saunders good night. He had discovered nothing of importance. True, the bimbâshi knew now that Major de Maura had had no visitors on Saturday but had gone out to mail letters shortly after seven o'clock, returning before eight —that he had been a married man with two daughters, and separated from his wife, who lived in Buenos Aires, for ten years—that he had proved himself a courageous and capable soldier—that he was effeminately proud of his small feet—that he was a chronic amorist—that he dyed his hair—that he had been involved in a local intrigue—that he had expensive taste in cigars and a streak of sadism in his character—together with one or two other trivial facts.

But as he walked on through the darkness Bimbâshi Barûk found himself saying aloud, "My shoes." He said it in a variety of ways, pronouncing the two words with subtle intonations, so that a number of motives might have inspired them. But "My shoes" remorselessly haunted him until at last he pulled up, turned and went back.

The immediate outcome of his second visit to Mrs. Saunders, from which he brought away a pair of shoes wrapped in newspaper, was a phone call to Colonel Dawney.

"Hullo, Colonel. Barûk here. I believe you are right about de Maura. Looks like an amazingly clever murder. I'm afraid I shall have to glance over the body. You seem to have missed something. Will it be troubling you?"

On the following morning, Bimbâshi Barûk set out on a tour of cobblers' shops in and around Lychgate. His routine was as follows:

"Good morning. My friend Major de Maura left a pair of shoes to be repaired. Are they ready?"

On learning from one that Major de Maura was not a customer he inquired the name of another. In this manner he had made six futile calls

when somebody suggested that he might try Mr. Stickle. The name sounded faintly familiar but although Mr. Stickle's establishment proved to be not more than three hundred yards from the White Hart he had no small difficulty in finding it.

The cottage, a seventeenth-century survival like the inn, shrank back from Lychgate Heath as if to avoid observation. It had a rusty red roof and diamond-paned windows, and it was smothered in sweet briar, now jeweled richly with scarlet berries. A brick path, worn in the center so as to resemble a shallow ditch, led from gate to porch. Above this porch appeared a sign which stated:

JEREMIAH STICKLE
SHOEMAKER
ESTABLISHED 1739

And, cross-legged on a bench inside the front window, so that he commanded a view of the path, was seated at his last none other than the little red man who had a voice like a macaw. The bimbâshi entered. The placed smelled of leather, hot wax, brass and a number of other things. Mr. Stickle went on hammering nails into the sole of an elderly boot and paid not the smallest attention to his visitor.

"Good morning," said the bimbâshi. "My friend Major de Maura left a pair of shoes to be repaired. Are they ready?"

Jeremiah Stickle glanced sideways and mumbled. His mouth was full of nails. When a row had been completed and certain redundant nails returned to a tin box, Mr. Stickle made up for his enforced silence.

"Collected 'em hisself on Friday mornin'," he squeaked. "Friday mornin' they was promised for and Friday mornin' he had 'em."

"H'm." The bimbâshi looked puzzled. "You mean, of course, a pair of brown shoes with perforated white uppers—sometimes known as 'correspondent's' shoes?"

"I do—and he had 'em Friday mornin'. Punctual I am, and knows me trade. When that picture what Joe Porter has of the White Hart in 1743, were made, this business stood here, it did, and a Stickle were in it."

He smiled proudly, displaying through a hole in his red beard those few teeth which had survived a lifetime devoted to chewing brass nails.

"So I gather," said the bimbâshi, wondering if a prosperous-looking spider whose web embraced one corner of the room had been in the picture also. "While you were amusing yourself at the White Hart on Thursday night, who was in charge here?"

"Amusin' meself!" Mr. Stickle's beard almost audibly crackled. "Let me tell you something, mister. Nobody can't get me out of a night—nobody. Don't hold with it these times. But Thursday night were a challenge. I never refuses a challenge. If there's a champion shoemaker around these parts, I reckon everybody knows where to find him. But"—his voice assumed its most

pathetic squeak—"I wish I knowed who done it."

"Who came while you were out?"

"Nobody. I lives by meself. When I goes out for a pint I puts this here board up what says, 'Back in ten minutes.' The other night there wasn't no board—but I got a good Yale lock and all the windows was fastened."

"Had anything been disturbed when you returned?"

" 'Course nothing had been disturbed. Who'd disturb it?"

"When did you finish work on the shoes?"

"Thursday afternoon. Half-heelin' were the job. He had extra high heels and wears 'em down accordin'."

"Who, except you, could have known when the shoes were finished and when they were to be called for?"

"Anybody who knowed me methods. Lots of people drops in for a talk like. Any of 'em could have knowed."

"Name some of these people."

Mr. Stickle scratched under his beard.

"Well—Tom Payne were in Wednesday, I think it were. Then Bill Hookey come in Friday. Sam Jollet, the constable, he step in nearly every day some time."

"Has any of these a key of the door?"

"Key o' the door! I wouldn't trust a key o' me door to no livin' man, no, nor woman neither, nobody livin'—except Dr. Allardyce."

"Why 'except Dr. Allardyce'?"

"Because Dr. Allardyce have one." He laughed as though he had scored a point. "Maybe you think Dr. Allardyce stole them shoes? Likely, too, I'd say!" he chuckled until his spectacles threatened to fall off. "That's a good 'un, that is."

"But why has Dr. Allardyce a key?"

" 'Cause I never ask for it to be give up. When I were layin' in me bed here with me bronchitis last spring, Dr. Allardyce have a key made to come in an' out. Stay best part o' one night along o' me, too. Aye, there ain't another doctor in Lychgate would have did it. I challenge you to find one. That's what I calls a real doctor. Always droppin' in for a chat, too, friendly like—"

"I see," said the bimbâshi. "Does Dr. Allardyce live near here?"

"Heath House. That's where Dr. Allardyce live." He took up the notice. "Back in ten minutes." "Would there be any objection to me goin' along to the White Hart for me pint?" he inquired.

Heath House, tendrils of creeper running like veins across its weather-beaten face, challenged the heath in rather forbidding silence. On a brass plate beside the gate appeared—

JULIAN ALLARDYCE, F.R.C.P.
(EDIN.)
DR. M. ALLARDYCE.

A trim, grim and elderly Scots-

woman opened the door to Bimbâshi Barûk. He was presently shown upstairs and left in a well-appointed study, both windows of which commanded extensive views of Lychgate Heath. He had waited no more than a minute when one of the three doors opened and a man who wore a long white coat came in. The bimbâshi felt the impact of a powerful personality.

"Good morning, Major Barûk. I understand that you wish to see me."

"Dr. Allardyce?"

"Julian Allardyce, at your service."

Julian Allardyce was tall, with a lean but athletic build of which his visitor approved—clean shaven, with abundant silvering hair brushed back from a fine brow. His gray eyes were steady in their regard and he would have been strikingly handsome if the bridge of a strong straight nose had not been broken at some time.

"My call concerns one of your patients—"

"I do not practise, sir, although I hold a medical degree." He had a light, vibrant voice and at times a somewhat arrogant academic manner. "I am employed in research work." Another of the three doors opened and a woman came in. Julian Allardyce extended a large, capable hand. "*This* is Dr. Allardyce."

Bimbâshi Barûk turned, and was about to say something about "your daughter" but his nimble wit stepped on his tongue in the nick of time. He contented himself with a formal bow.

"Major Barûk wishes to see you about one of your patients, Marian." Julian Allardyce bowed slightly to the bimbâshi. "This is my wife. And now, no doubt you will excuse me, sir, as I am engaged upon work of some urgency."

He went out.

"Won't you sit down, Major Barûk." Mrs. Allardyce spoke in quiet, cultured and musical tones. "I hope I can help you. Which of my patients is it?"

Bimbâshi Barûk took a seat in an armchair and Mrs. Allardyce on a deep settee placed between two windows. The bimbâshi wondered how even Jeremiah Stickle had contrived to gabble for several minutes without betraying the fact that "Dr. Allardyce" was feminine.

He noted that she was dressed now in a smart tweed suit, that she was slight and shapely and her husband's junior by many years. Her dark hair, in which one might detect faint coppery streaks, had a most intriguing wave. She wore spectacles and, smiling so as to display small, milky-white teeth, she removed the spectacles and laid them beside her.

"My professional disguise," she explained. "I have learned that they give patients confidence."

He found himself looking into amber eyes fringed by long, curling lashes, and he knew that Mrs. Allardyce was a remarkably beautiful woman. He knew too that she was not English. A swift picture of the

story took form in his brain, clear and strong as a good photographic print.

"Actually, I am interested in two patients," he replied slowly. "The first is Gabriel Varez."

Mrs. Allardyce watched him steadily. Her expression was unfathomable.

"I have no patient of that name."

"Shall I say, then, *was* Gabriel Varez? The other is Jeremiah Stickle."

"I have certainly attended Stickle, but not lately. Is he ill again?"

"Not at all, nor is he of more than secondary importance. I am chiefly anxious to know why you sent a phone message to Major de Maura on behalf of Gabriel Varez."

"You say that *I* sent such a message?"

The bimbâshi hated his task more and more every minute. His peculiar system of interrogation called for great moral courage in practise—but he had outlined the inquiry to Colonel Dawney in this way—(1) definite evidence that curare was used. This he believed he had secured. (2) Somebody who had some or who could obtain it.

In this household he had found at least somebody who could obtain it and also somebody who could have had access to de Maura's shoes while they were in Stickle's workshop. Her appearance suggested that this beautiful woman, who possessed leopard eyes and a preoccupied husband, might conceivably be (3) de Maura's secret visitor. There were weak features in the formula but in lieu of a better he allowed it to dictate his next remark.

"My dear Mrs. Allardyce," he said, "it would be nearly impossible to mistake your voice."

"My voice?"

"Your words were, 'Please tell Major Rafael de Maura that Gabriel Varez is with him in spirit.' Your voice is undisguisable."

"But *you* did not—"

She checked herself, dropped protective lashes—but it was too late. At last that extra sense of the bimbâshi's had awakened. The completed sentence reached his brain, it was— "But *you* did not take the message." He sighed and stood up. He was acutely uncomfortable. He stared out of a window, learning that the cottage of Jeremiah Stickle was visible from that point. Then he turned.

"Let me make my position clear." His voice was gentle, almost apologetic. "I hold a sort of warrant, authorizing all Officers Commanding, Chief Constables and others, to afford me every facility. In point of fact, my present visit is not an official one." Mrs. Allardyce rose from the settee and confronted him. "Would you care to give me particulars and leave the result to my conscience—or do you prefer that I pass the inquiry over to the police with such evidence as I have?"

Her hands had been clenched but she relaxed them.

"What evidence have you?" she asked coldly.

He took out a small leather box, velvet-lined. It had formerly held

pearl studs. It now contained an odd-looking object, which he handled gingerly.

"This thorn—a briar thorn, I think—neatly attached to a wooden peg. It was inserted in a hole bored between the sole and the upper leather of de Maura's right shoe, so that his toe would come in contact with the point. In fact, this occurred according to plan and he removed the shoes to learn the cause of the trouble. His finger also was pricked by the thorn.

"Now the case rests like this—there is a black substance on the thorn; and I suggest that no one in the neighborhood—except your husband and yourself—knows, or knew, (a) Gabriel Varez—(b) Major de Maura—and (c) where to obtain this substance, which is curare. Furthermore no one else, other than Stickle, has a key to Stickle's cottage.

"No, Mrs. Allardyce, I did not receive your telephone message but I believe that it was you who sent it and I suggest that it was someone in this house who lured Stickle out on Thursday night. I have only one question to ask—why was it done?"

There was an interval during which amber eyes searched his own, an interval which the bimbâshi knew must decide the swing of the pendulum. Then Mrs. Allardyce pointed to the armchair and returned to her place on the settee.

"You are a clever man, Major Barûk," she said, speaking with perfect composure. "I salute you. Since you have found the shoe it would be useless on my part to refuse your offer. Scotland Yard would meet with no difficulty in tracing my former relations with Rafael de Maura and the identity of Gabriel Varez. So I will tell you the story, and you may do as you please. Shall we smoke?"

She offered a cigarette from a box beside her and took one herself. Bimbâshi Barûk took one also and lighted both. He sat down again.

"Am I to suppose from your words, Major Barûk, that you believe my husband to be concerned?"

"Not necessarily. I await your story with an open mind. You spoke of your former relations with Rafael de Maura. Suppose we begin there?"

Mrs. Allardyce nodded quietly. Her expression grew introspective.

"Rafael de Maura was a member of a well-known family which owned large estates in Santa Fé. They adjoined our own. Rafael was handsome, fascinating and an experienced woman-hunter, although I did not know it at the time. I was nineteen. But deceived by all sorts of solemn promises, or perhaps because I was blindly infatuated, I consented to his proposals—only to discover that he had a devoted wife living in Buenos Aires.

"Even this might have failed to cure me completely, if I had not met Gabriel Varez. Gabriel was the son of a neighboring doctor and we were both studying medicine. I learned

then that what I had mistaken for love was no more than an outburst of adolescent passion. Gabriel taught me this."

Her eyes glowed as if a somber fire burned in the brain behind them —and the bimbâshi wondered by means of what arts the dour Scottish scientist had won the affection of this beautiful turbulent woman.

"To come to the point of my story —Rafael found Gabriel and myself together. There was an unpleasant scene. Later, there was worse, when I told him quite plainly that Gabriel knew everything about us and that Gabriel and I were to be married. Now you must understand that Rafael's ardor had by no means cooled. He was not yet tired of me —nor would his vanity permit him to believe that I was tired of him.

"He made threats which would have shown me—supposing I had not known it already—that I had been infatuated by as callous a ruffian as ever breathed. All the same the next two months were among the happiest of my life. Then came the end. If you will excuse me for a moment I will show you in what form it came."

Mrs. Allardyce stood up and went out. A swift doubt leaped to the bimbâshi's mind, to be dismissed as swiftly. Indeed, she was not absent more than two minutes and when she returned and resumed her place on the settee she handed him a faded note. He glanced at it and shook his head. It was in Spanish.

"I will translate for you, Major. It says, 'Please tell Gabriel Varez that I am with him in spirit. Rafael.' Gabriel was dying when it came—I nursed him throughout. And *this* was the cause of his death."

From a wooden box she took a thorn fixed to a round wooden plug and held it up for the bimbâshi's inspection.

"An *opuntia* thorn—prickly pear —coated with curare. The de Mauras employed an old colored servant, Hannibal, who was widely credited with being an Obeah man—and such people understand the use of secret poisons. He was utterly devoted to Rafael. I knew from experience that Hannibal could smuggle messages with incredible cunning—he seemed almost to be able to make himself invisible.

"Gabriel one evening walked over to see me and had scarcely set his foot on the veranda when he collapsed. I had him undressed and put to bed. I was terrified. His symptoms were those of paralysis. I sent for the nearest doctor—his father —and almost lost my reason because he was so long in coming. When he arrived, it was already too late. Gabriel's mind was clear but he had lost the power of speech—"

Her composure, which had earned the bimbâshi's respectful admiration, threatened to break down but she conquered this weakness and went on.

"Late that night Hannibal came with a message from Rafael de Maura. It was this, which you have seen. He left the room before I had read it but I ran after him. What is

more I caught him—stealing out of the back porch with the shoes which Gabriel had worn! In one of them I found this thorn." She replaced it in the box.

"Now, I am sure you understand that I belong to a hot-blooded race—I was Mariana Borrego. I swore a most solemn—as I realized later, a most dreadful—oath beside Gabriel's bed, that I would repay." She shrugged her shoulders and lighted a second cigarette from the stub of the first.

"The de Mauras had met with misfortune. Indeed, we all had. Rafael fled to Spain so soon after Gabriel's death that I had no time to act. I went to Buenos Aires and later took my degree there. It was during my first year that I met my husband. He came as a visiting lecturer from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

"Ah, Major Barûk, England seldom knows her greatest men. Beginning as an almost religious respect for a wonderful intellect my affection for Julian grew into a love that nothing in life can ever change—perhaps nothing afterwards. If Gabriel had lived it would not have been possible but, Gabriel dead, I found in Julian all that I had lost—indeed, more.

"He does not work for profit, nor to aid destruction. He works for human good. He has no vanity. He seeks no honors. You saw his name on our plate—Julian Allardyce, F.R.C.P. He holds five other degrees. He might have been wealthy, titled if he wished. He does not so wish—nor do I."

She paused, and the bimbâshi noted that her eyes glowed in a new way. He found occasion to reproach himself for his bad habit of jumping to conclusions. This was not the story as he had reconstructed it.

"We returned to England, and I set up in practise. I was fairly successful. Then, one day—nearly two months ago—I saw Rafael de Maura and I remembered my"—she hesitated—"solemn obligations. But I made up my mind not to tell Julian, as I knew how it would disturb him. I saw Rafael going into the shop of an old patient, Jeremiah Stickle, and I could not refuse to believe that I had been chosen as an instrument of justice.

"My husband is working on a new treatment for tetanus—it is based on curare. And I remembered that I had a key of Stickle's door! All that remained was to get ready and to await another visit of Rafael to the shoemaker. I prepared a briar thorn, coating it with curare from Julian's laboratory and then fixing a bead of gum on the point, as had been done in Gabriel's case, so that the scratch would not take place until the heat of the foot dissolved the gum. This, a brad awl and a tube of seccotine were all that was necessary.

"I made it my business to call often on Stickle when passing—for I should have known Rafael's shoes at a glance because of their small size and high heels. My opportunity

came a month ago—" She paused.

"A month ago?"

"Yes, my first opportunity. I discovered that a pair of Rafael de Maura's shoes would be finished on a certain Wednesday evening—and I gave Stickle a seat for the local cinema. He blankly refused to go. I am afraid I got really angry. But the attempt had to be given up. He declared that nothing would induce him to leave the house at night. I thought over the problem for a week or more before a possible solution came to me—Stickle's professional vanity and his love of money.

"In the meantime I found out all I could about Rafael de Maura. He saw me once but owing to my 'disguise,' I suppose, failed to recognize me. I discovered the name of the poor little soul who was risking her happiness to amuse him. Beyond saying that she is the wife of a young officer commanding a submarine in the Mediterranean I must be silent. Many women would condemn her—but a few, who had had the misfortune to be hunted by Rafael de Maura.

"Yes"—her brilliant eyes challenged the bimbâshi's—"I know you thought at one time that I was his secret visitor. Well—my second opportunity came and I put that absurd advertisement in the *County Mirror*. I typed it on a sheet of plain paper and enclosed a ten-shilling note. It succeeded. While Stickle was out on Thursday night, I opened his door and made a fairly neat job of what I had come to do."

"Those shoes," murmured the bimbâshi, and shook his head reproachfully. "Had you given due reflection to their history after they had served your purpose? My dear Mrs. Allardyce, you might now be responsible for a score of deaths!"

"Good heavens!" She bit her full, red lower lip. "To have overlooked *that!*"

He shook his head again. This woman's emotional reactions were too tropical for analysis.

"But the telephone message?"

"It was purely by accident that I learned on Friday night how well I had succeeded. I was called out to a case in the same street and was told about the ambulance calling at Mrs. Saunders'. This tempted me to send the message from a public call-box, spoken in carefully bad English, which I suppose completed the case against me. So now you know how de Maura died—and why."

"On the contrary, Marian," came a light, vibrant voice, "you have grossly misled the major!"

Bimbâshi Barûk sprang up and turned, all in one movement. Julian Allardyce stood in a doorway directly behind him. He was looking at his wife, and there was a smile about his lips.

"Julian!" she whispered.

"Major Barûk, I fear I have been eavesdropping. I beg your pardon. I happened, not by design, to see my wife take from her bureau certain —relics. I thought it to be my duty to do what I have done. The story which you have heard, of the death of Gabriel Varez, is true in every particular. I have, myself, examined

the substance on the thorn which killed him. It is curare. But that upon the briar you have is *not.*"

"Julian!"—his wife's voice was husky—"what are you saying?"

"I am endeavoring to correct any misapprehension under which Major Barûk may be laboring. Allow me to make my meaning clear, Major. When Rafael de Maura first appeared in this district, some two months ago, I chanced to hear of his arrival. I may say that I had never met him, but I knew the whole story. I knew also that one of Marian's family might well hold views regarding the sanctity of an oath made to a dying man which others would look upon more tolerantly."

He crossed to his wife, with that light, lithe step which characterized his movements, and stood beside her.

"Nevertheless, Marian, I knew from your behavior that you had seen him—and those fears of mine were shown to be justified. Your earliest experiments with briar thorns and small spigots of soft wood did not escape my attention."

He fixed his analytical gaze upon the bimbâshi. "You may possibly inquire, sir, why I hesitated to put an end to these preparations for murder. I will answer you in this way—by the common laws of men, de Maura's life was forfeit—by the private laws of the Borregos, of whom my wife is one, it was forfeit to her. But I hoped and believed that if the attempt should be made and fail, she would consider her duty—for as a sacred duty she regarded it—to be done. I knew also that de Maura was soon to be posted elsewhere."

Julian Allardyce sat down beside his wife—and the bimbâshi reflected that a wise man is uncertain of everything.

"Forgive my discourtesy, Major. Please be seated. I cannot know if Marian has told you—I overheard only part of your conversation—but I am engaged upon experiments with a new antidote for tetanus. I am employing, not without success, one based upon curarine.

"It follows that I have a stock of curare in my laboratory. It is somewhat difficult to come by in England and I keep what I have in a special container. However, detecting my wife's purpose, I transferred it to another and placed a harmless preparation in the original flask—"

"But, Julian"—Marian Allardyce's voice remained husky—"how could it have been harmless, when—"

"When de Maura died?" He patted her shoulder. "You planned your murder perfectly. Do not reproach yourself. You see, he did not die of curare poisoning—he died of tetanus."

"If I may interrupt for a moment," said the bimbâshi diffidently, "I have seen the scratch on his foot as well as that on his finger."

"No doubt, sir. I have conceded the point that this attempt was well planned. But there are laws higher than those of Spanish retributive justice. De Maura some days before

had sustained a cut on his left calf from partly buried barbed wire. No doubt you have seen this scar also?"

The bimbâshi inclined his head.

"He called upon a local practitioner, who noted unsatisfactory conditions and who also chanced to be acquainted with me and my special studies. Dr. Weldon and his patient came to consult me."

"You mean"—Mrs. Allardyce spoke in a low tone—"that Rafael de Maura came *here?*"

"Certainly. I made the appointment for a time when I knew you would be away from home, and de Maura had no reason to suspect the identity of my wife. Perhaps I need not stress the point, Major Barûk, but prognosis in such cases is extremely difficult. Tetanus sometimes supervenes as late as ten days after infection. Even I am not infallible.

"In my second year at Edinburgh I was regarded as at least the equal of any middleweight in Great Britain and I remain physically fit. I will not deny that the temptation to thrash de Maura to within an inch of his life was strong upon me—but man for man I stood in a different class and I conquered the impulse.

"I examined the wound and gave the best advice in my power. Finally, I should be glad if you would arrange to have the substance upon the thorn examined by a competent person other than myself. I naturally regret this exposure of intimate domestic matters but I have complete confidence in your discretion. I do not pretend to apologize for my wife."

He put his arm about her shoulders. "Circumstances and the heritage of Borrego blood explain her slightly irregular behavior. If I can assist you in any other way at any time, pray call upon me, Major."

SOLUTION TO "THE DETECTIVE'S DILEMMA"

If Inspector Burke, who was wide awake at the time, failed to hear the maid scream or at least cry out while trying to prevent Marilyn Reid Iveria from committing suicide, Iveria could scarcely have heard her cry out in her sleep—especially as he had claimed to be asleep himself at the time. Hence there would have been small point in her tampering either with lock or hassock, since her summons would have gone unheard. And had she used some other method of summoning him Iveria would certainly have mentioned it in his effort to incriminate his wife.

Therefore, if Iveria was acting in good faith, he must have dreamed he heard his wife cry out—in which case she could hardly be held responsible for his death. And if he was acting in bad faith, then he must either have been on his way, gun in hand, to kill his wife—or have deliberately plotted his own death so as to have Marilyn accused of his murder.

Inspector Burke reached for the telephone on his desk.

the mother goose murders

by . . . . . Richard Sale

A whimsical slayer advertises his murders in advance—and fabulous Candid Jones is dismayed to find himself listed among going events.

—I HAD A DATE FOR LUNCH with Harry Rentano, and he picked me up at twelve-thirty at 45th and Fifth Avenue, where my studio is located. I was working on a full-color job with Claire Crosman, my favorite model, showing the public the sort of bathing suit that would be worn in the very near summer to come. There wasn't much of the suit, as Rentano said later, but there was a lot of Crosman, which isn't hard to take. So we were a little late and we took Claire along too. She said I didn't pay her enough to buy a square meal for her.

Anyway, we went down Fifth toward 42nd and we saw this sandwich man. Funny how a case begins sometimes. You see it right from the very start and you don't know you're watching it. The sandwich man was a Bowery bum if you ever saw one. When I say sandwich man, I mean one of those guys who haunts the sidewalks of New York with advertising matter strapped onto his front and back.

The sign this fellow wore was strapped right around his middle and rose up on braces way over his head. It was meant to work in crowds because the advertising matter didn't begin on his back. The sign itself only started on the braces when it cleared his head.

Psychiatrists have long expressed dismay at the savage cruelty which lurks closely beneath the innocuous surface of virtually all children's nursery rhymes and fables. Surely Goosey, Goosey Gander, Humpty Dumpty *and* Cock Robin *seem innocent enough—yet in Mr. Sale's long novelet these gentle jingles prove deadly enough to spread alarm through all of Manhattan.*

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As a result, the sign was really six or seven feet from the ground and you could spot it if you were a midget or from a moving car, like ourselves, or from a Fifth Avenue bus. The sign didn't advertise anything, which was the catch.

It was ordinary white poster board, and on it, not drawn with any great finesse, was the following legend—

Goosey, Goosey Gander,
Whither shall I wander?
Upstairs and downstairs
And in my lady's chamber.
Once I saw an old man
Who wouldn't say his prayers.
I took him by the left leg
And threw him down the stairs.

I had my Leica G with me and I instantly guessed the exposure at 1/50 of a second, f6.3 and drew a bead on him as he moved along and took two pictures. They were a cinch for ten bucks apiece from a picture magazine.

"Get a load of that," I said aloud. "What will advertising come to next?"

"But it isn't an ad," said Claire Crosman. "It's a nursery rhyme. What does it mean? That's all it says. I can't see anything else."

"I can't either," Rentano said. "It doesn't advertise a thing. Just that goofy rhyme."

"All you have to do," I said, "is ask the man his business."

"Thanks," Rentano said dryly. "I think I will."

He pulled the police car over to the curb and stopped it. He and I got out and left Claire in the back seat. Rentano, in case you haven't met him before, is Inspector Harry Rentano of the police department's homicide bureau—one of the best cops in the business and a guy with so much of a lion's heart that he broke up the Mafia in the old days when he was on the bomb squad, almost singlehanded.

Rentano didn't look like a modern cop but then he wasn't modern. Harry was conservative and a little old-fashioned and he looked it. He didn't wear a uniform, of course, but if he had he would have resembled the policeman of 1890, billy, mustache and parabola hat. Rentano had a brown mustache, which was pretty shaggy, and he was a trifle short and too heavy for his height. Plump but not fat.

He wore a Herbert Hoover starched collar and his suits were old stuff. He was slightly bald on the front of his skull and he hid it by combing his good hair across the slight gap. You've seen these caricatures of bartenders in the Diamond Jim era? Give him dark eyes, a few character lines from nose to mouth, tufts of white hair in the ears, and you'd have Harry Rentano.

We walked across the sidewalk to the sandwich man. Everybody who went by—and it was pretty crowded at lunch hour—glanced at that sign, read it, giggled, wondered what the hell it was all about and then went on their respective ways. Rentano moved up in front of the stumble-bum and stuck a hand

against the guy's chest. "Pull up a minute, bo," he said and flashed his gold badge in the palm of his hand.

The sandwich man was a down-and-outer with a vermilion nose and huge pores. He needed a shave and his beard was grayish and his face was pretty dirty.

"I ain't doin' anything against the law," he whined. "So help me, guvnor, I'm just earnin' an honest dollar!"

"What's your name?" Rentano asked quietly. "No one said you were breaking the law."

"M'name's Monk," said the sandwich man. "George Monk. Don't take me in, copper. I'm just off the island and makin' an honest dollar with this sign. Give me a break—"

I said, "What does the sign mean, Monk?"

"Don't mean nothin'," he whined. "Just a sign. Just a nursery rhyme. I don't know what it means. This guy—he's payin' me a coupla bucks to cart it around Fifth all afternoon, that's all. He paid me already. He just gave me the sign and he says to cart it and that he'll check up on me and if I lay low he'll put the cops on me. So I'm only earnin' an honest buck, guvnor."

Rentano frowned. "You don't know what it means, then?"

"God's truth, officer. I don't know."

A crowd had been collecting, so Rentano told the guy to mind his *p*'s and *q*'s. Then we got back into the car and drove down to the Lobster House for a shore dinner. We had a good meal and when we finished Harry telephoned Centre Street to see if there was anything new and there was.

When he came back, he said, "I've got a murder case," and he looked sober. "Want to come, Candid?"

"I can't," I said. "The trouble with being Candid Jones is that you have too many fingers in the pie at too many times. I ought to know. I'm he. But seriously, Harry, I've got to finish this color job today. It's too close to deadline and the account is an important one. I've got the whole setup right for the camera now and Claire here is on call and I think I'd better finish."

"Just as you say," Rentano said. "I'll drive you back."

He left us at the studio and went on his way. Claire and I went upstairs and she changed back into the bathing suit and I went to work. It was a nice job. We'd built a real sandy beach and I had a sun umbrella and beach gadgets around and Claire, made up tan as a berry, was stretched out on the sand.

All this took about an hour. I had just about finished, when the telephone rang. Claire answered it and said, "Yes, he's here. I'll put him on, Sherlock. Hold your breath." She turned to me and said, "That man with his murder case again."

I went over and picked up the handset. "Hello, Harry."

"Listen, Candid. I think you'd better come over here and get a load of this setup. Did McGuire of Apex get in touch with you yet?"

"No," I said. "No one has called here this afternoon."

"Are you finished? Can you come over? The address is eleven hundred thirty-one Sutton Place—second floor. Come on over."

"All right. I finished the job here. I'll come." I hung up and turned to tell Claire when the telephone rang again. This time it was McGuire of the Apex Insurance Company, which insures anything and anybody against everything from twins to being marooned at the South Pole.

"Candid?"

"Hello, Mac. What's on your mind?"

"Rentano called me about a murder case, kiddo. Ernest Gosling, one of our clients, is the corpse. We had him insured for sixty-two grand, with a double indemnity hooker. Accidental death. That's going to be a lot to shell out. We don't mind paying if he has it coming but if the beneficiary did the job there's no payment to her. You know that. Will you check for us? Two hundred fish for you."

"Sure," I said. "I'll check. Who's the beneficiary?"

"His niece, a gal named Susan Lathrop. Lives at the Sutton Place house with him. See how things look. We're holding up payment of the estate anyhow. It's murder. When they solve it we'll pay, providing everything is on the level. What the hell, I don't have to tell you all that. You worked here long enough."

"I'll cover," I said, and hung up.

Claire Crosman looked annoyed. "Every time it looks as though I'm going to be able to spend a peaceful afternoon with my dream boy something comes up."

"Cut it out," I said, flushing. "If I'm your dream boy, you'll wind up an old maid."

"There's something wrong with you," Claire said. "I'm a knockout. Men cry for me, young sprouts out of college send me mash notes and to all of them I say my heart belongs to Daddy—*you*. And what does it get me? Insults. The whole trouble with you is you don't know how to handle a woman, except if she's a toughie who's committed a crime. Then you treat her as if she were a man."

"Maybe you're right," I said. "Look, you're a nice kid. But I married once and it didn't take and I don't want to try it again ever. So take your predatory claws out of my back."

Claire sighed. "Well, I'll just keep trying. Why and what I see in you I don't know. Candid Jones, jack of all trades. Photographer, newspaper man, ex-private detective, ex-investigator for the Apex Company, ex-amateur minicam fan, ex-everything."

"Ex-actly," I said. "Scram. I'm on my way and I'll give you a call when I want you again."

"It's a hard life," Claire said. "So long." And I left.

Claire was right when she said "jack of all trades." I'd come a long

and devious way since those first days when I went into business with the Pinkerton Agency as a private detective, then branched out on my own and finally joined the investigating staff of the Apex Insurance Company. That was all a long time ago. And my name was Candid Jones in those days too.

Most people think I got the moniker Candid after I started playing around with cameras, but that isn't so. A man named Barney Doyle, who was murdered three years ago by a ring of diamond smugglers in Miami, gave me that name. Barney had been a friend of my father and when my father was killed in line of duty Barney looked out for me.

The day I started out with Pinkerton, Barney said to me, "Always remember, Terry. A cop is good when he's candid with tongue, gun and fist. Your father was shot because he gave the crook a break. Never give a criminal an even break, not even if it makes you the most hard-boiled cop in the world. And always be candid. There's a name for you. Candid Jones."

And it stuck.

I stayed with the Apex Insurance Company for nine years and in those nine years, every stoolie, tinhorn and crook on the Gay White Way knew me. They used to say on Broadway that Candid Jones had an iceberg where his heart should have been, and that ice-water ran in his veins instead of blood. His nine-millimeter Luger was remembered in awe, because it made a terrible wound when it killed, and Candid Jones seldom fired it to inflict a flesh wound. The con men used to tip their hats to Candid Jones when they passed him. He was hard-boiled and tough and they all knew it.

Well, Barney was right. I was tough and I lived. If I'd been soft I'd have died. I was only touched by a bullet once.

When photography became the craze I went crazy with it. I had a lot of money salted away and I bought cameras and had such good luck with my pictures, I left the sleuthing business for commercial photography. But when there is cop in you, it never leaves you and it wasn't long before I was covering special cases for Apex when they needed help.

It was back in those days that I first met Rentano and we became friends.

When I arrived at 1131 Sutton Place, there was a pair of radio cars outside—Rentano's black prowl car and old Black Maria, the Public Welfare Department's corpse-remover. The flatfoot out front was Sullivan of the 32nd Precinct. I knew him and he let me in.

I found Rentano and his bloodhounds all over the first floor. I entered first a narrow hallway, from which a steep flight of stairs went up to the second floor. To the right was a door into the living room and since I could hear activity in this room I went right in.

The corpse was on a couch.

"Hello, kiddo," Rentano said. "Come on over and have yourself a look."

There were fingerprint men taking prints all over the place. The police fotog was snapping pictures, harsh contrasty black and whites with photoflash bulbs. You'd have thought it was a début instead of a death. I went over to the couch where the body lay and stood beside Dr. Kerr Kyne, the chief medical examiner of New York County, a sourpuss with a yen for golf who was a fine medico. He was finishing his examination.

"Well, Rentano," he said slowly, "your man didn't die from the fall. In my opinion he was dealt a sharp blow over the head. A blunt instrument. Sounds like the inevitable weapon and usually is but the back of his skull is bashed in badly. I think he was killed instantly. It's more than just a fracture. He was hit with enough force to cause a severe depression and crush the brain."

I said, "What's wrong with his right leg? It looks peculiar."

"It ought to," Dr. Kyne said wryly. "It's an artificial leg. My word, Candid, didn't you ever hear of Ernest Gosling before? He's a famous old literary character, the Bob Ingersoll of today. He lost that right leg in the war but he got around remarkably well with the wooden one. . . .

"That's all I can do on this one, Rentano. The post mortem will be ready in the morning, providing you get this corpse down to me right away. Here's your removal order." He stared at Gosling a moment, then shrugged. "Well, he's finding out right now whether or not he was right." And then he left.

I asked Rentano what Dr. Kyne was talking about and asked for some dope on the killing.

"In the first place," Rentano said, "we found this guy at the bottom of those stairs in the hall. He was all sprawled out and it was plain he'd fallen down them face first. Take a gander at the bruises or what would be bruises if he were alive. He was all twisted up and the back of his head was bashed in."

"Yeah," I said. "Looks like a blackjack without the leather around it. Straight lead would do that."

"It seems he's got a niece named Susan Lathrop, lives here with him. The gal works. She's what they call a reader in one of the book-publishing houses. I sent Babcock down to pick her up and bring her in to headquarters. But according to the maid next door Miss Lathrop left at eight this morning and Gosling was still alive then and the dame didn't come back.

"The maid is one of those people who minds everyone else's business. Around ten o'clock, a man went in, she says, and left at ten fifteen. She didn't get a good look at him at all. Says he must have been a house-to-house salesman. Claghorn is giving that snoopy maid a tongueful of questions next door."

"No weapon?"

"Can't find the weapon here.

Might have been almost anything but there's no sign of his hair or blood on any blunt object in the place. Not yet, anyhow. A funny one, Candid, a funny one. This guy was a nut. It's a wonder he didn't get bumped by someone long before this. I guess Gosling was the greatest agnostic of the twentieth century.

"He used to lecture in Town Hall on the fact that his world had no god, there couldn't be a god, religion was merely superstition, there was no Heaven or Hell. Atheist? This guy had atheism beat all hollow. He didn't believe in anything pertaining to the soul of man, including the soul of man.

"Look at this string of nonfiction he turned out. Get a load of those titles. Hot stuff, eh? *Man: Soulless Beast? The Myth of God and Man. The Symbol of Superstition. God, the Neurotic's Hope.* He was a bitter boy, this one, and I can't say the world has sustained a great loss—but there's a law against murder in this town, so here I am."

But as I stood looking at the gaunt and soulless face of Ernest Gosling, a long sad erudite face, waxy yellow, the thin mouth sagging, the cold blue eyes open and staring, a chill began to work up and down my back and I could feel the hair on my neck actually beginning to stand on end.

Suddenly a violent shudder grabbed me and shook me. Rentano saw it and snapped, "What's wrong with you?"

"Harry," I whispered. "Harry! The sign. The sandwich man. Look at this stiff. Don't you see it?"

"Who?" Rentano said. "You mean the little booze monkey who was hauling the nursery rhyme on Fifth Avenue? I don't see—"

I said hoarsely, "*Once I met an old man who wouldn't say his prayers—*"

"He was an atheist!"

"*I took him by the left leg and threw him down the stairs.*"

"He didn't have a right leg! If anyone threw him down the stairs it had to be his left!"

"And his name!" I said. "His very name, Harry. Don't you see? Gosling. Gosling means Gander. Goose. Goosey Goosey Gander!"

Rentano took out a handkerchief and wiped his face where the sweat had quickly collected. "What have we got?" he asked with a gasp. "A killer with nursery rhymes who pays stumble-bums to go out and advertise the crime? What does it mean?"

But I didn't have the answer.

II

It was four P.M. by the time we got back to Fifth Avenue to try and lay hands upon George Monk, the sign-toter. We wanted a description of the man who had paid him to carry that nursery rhyme around. But when we got there, the cupboard was bare. George Monk wasn't making his rounds. The sign was gone and he was gone.

Rentano told the cops on duty along the way to keep an eye out for the old monkey, and then we

went down to headquarters. There Rentano went up to the Telegraph Bureau and had a message sent to all cars to pick up George Monk. His description followed. Then we returned to his office, where Detective Babcock had Miss Susan Lathrop in custody.

I knew before that it was an open and shut murder case and that Susan Lathrop was on the outside. She hadn't done it. To have hit tall gangling Gosling on the dome with that force she would have had to stand on a chair. And I couldn't see any such acrobatics at the head of a flight of stairs.

Next instant, when we met her, I knew I was right. She was tiny, she was sweet and she was frightened. I think I expected to meet a sourpuss of the first order when I heard of her, because after seeing Gosling, who was as sober and gaunt a stiff as ever populated a morgue, it was natural to think a relative would be the same.

This kid looked beat and Rentano had a heart and didn't give her the works.

"I didn't know anything about it," she whispered in reply to questions. "Uncle Ernest was all right this morning when I left him. As all right as he ever was. I went to my job. I read novels at Black, Moon and Black, the publishers. I didn't know anything had happened until Mr. Babcock walked in and told me and said I'd have to come down to headquarters."

"She didn't take it too hard, boss," Babcock grunted. "She was nice about comin' and everything but she didn't take it hard."

"You wouldn't have taken it hard either," Rentano said.

"He didn't see the puss on that corpse," I said. "He must have been a great guy to live with."

Susan Lathrop's voice was very husky and low and pleasant. "I didn't have much choice. My parents are dead and I had no money. Uncle Ernest took me in, was taking care of me until such time as I was able to support myself, or until I married someone."

"Well," I said, "your worries are over. He left you sixty-two grand in insurance."

"Sixty-two grand?"

"Sixty-two thousand iron men, Miss Lathrop. Dollars. Didn't you know he had named you beneficiary in his policy?"

"I didn't even know he was insured," she said. Her mouth quivered and she started to cry. "You mean he insured himself for me? I can't believe it. He was so cold."

"No," I said. "He was insured before. Long before. The beneficiary was his wife. She died two years ago, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"He switched it to you after that."

"I didn't even live with him then. But I'm the only relative he had left." She wiped away a tear. "I shouldn't take the money. I never liked him. No one did. He was a bitter man. He believed in nothing and lived only to try and spread

the belief. A worthless sort of life."

"Don't be silly," I said. "Money is money." I looked at Rentano. "Anything else?"

"Hell yes," Rentano said wearily. "You're not getting her out of here yet. She must have known the people who came to see her uncle—his enemies. Who would have killed him and why, Miss Lathrop?"

She didn't know anything. She gave Rentano a list of names of people who used to come and argue with Gosling, and fight with him, and ridicule him, and humiliate him. When she got finished it sounded like a lineup of every important literary name and address in the big town. Rentano knew he couldn't haul top-flight people in and accuse them of murder without getting in Dutch.

That's all we got out of that case. It was a perfect job of murder. Not a clue, not a lead of any value. The Mother Goose killer could have got away with murder on Ernest Gosling if he had only stopped there.

But he didn't stop there. He had no intention of stopping there—or anywhere. He would have gone on and on if he hadn't been stopped. And as it was, every living soul in New York was buying and reading nursery rhymes in a terrified second childhood to see if they were listed as potential victims anywhere in the collection.

The following morning, a Wednesday, I had a telephone call. It was early, around eight-thirty A.M., and I was asleep when the bell rang. I got up and answered it.

"Candid Jones?"

"Yes," I said sleepily. "This is he. Who's calling?"

"This is Richard Stacey," he said. "Of the *Dispatch*. You may have heard of me. Or of my radio program, at least. Ever listened to Riddle-Me-This? Wednesday nights nine P.M. station WQRS."

Rick Stacey was one of the foremost critics and book reviewers in the United States. His good word on a novel had often made it a best seller, and his thumbs-down had killed a book with a sale of less than two hundred. He was good.

He had this radio program on WQRS on Wednesday nights and it was the only intelligent program in existence. Rick Stacey had persuaded them to try the program on a bet that the intelligence of the radio audience was far above the twelve-year-old rating the polls gave it, and Riddle-Me-This had been very successful.

The idea was simple enough. Every week Rick Stacey invited several prominent people to join his board. These guys were called the Know-It-Alls and the idea was for the listeners to send in questions which would stump the Know-It-Alls. Every time a Know-It-All missed the one who sent the question made ten bucks.

"Well, look here, Mr. Jones," Rick Stacey said pleasantly. "Mr. Gosling, now deceased, was supposed to be present as a Know-It-All on my program tonight but some

dastardly fellow had the gall to bash in his head, according to the morning newspapers. Your own name was prominently mentioned in the news, and I thought you would make a wonderful substitute for Gosling as a Know-It-All in Riddle-Me-This."

I winced. "Look, Mr. Stacey, I think your program is swell. I think the whole idea is good. I don't miss it on the air if I can help it. But you don't want me. I'm not a Know-It-All, and you'd lose money on me every time. I'm a very ignorant fellow."

"I don't believe it," said Stacey. "And I'll bet you five bucks that you've sat at the set many a time and thought to yourself that the Know-It-Alls were pretty thick and that you were answering many of the questions when they weren't.

"Oh, come on, Candid Jones. It will make the program doubly exciting. We've never had a famous detective and photographer on the program—and that coupled with the Gosling murder will make for excellent listener interest. Besides, there is a hundred dollars in it for you—the Know-It-All fee."

"I'd make a fool of myself."

"Fine. The listeners love that. If we answered them all it would be no fun for the fellows who send in the questions, hoping for the ten dollars on each miss. Oh, come on. You'll have a good time."

"All right," I said. "I'm on."

"Be at the studio at around eight-thirty, eh?"

"Okay," I said. "I'll be there." I hung up, and I instantly began regretting the assent. I'd never been on the radio before, and I knew I'd be as nervous as a bride. There is something awesome about being made a fool in front of three or four million people whom you can't even see.

I got the morning paper outside the door and took it back to the kitchen with me while I whipped out some coffee. The Gosling murder was all over the front page, there was a picture of Rentano and one of me—an old job—in a feature on the side. And suddenly I noticed a third yarn of the same group. The headline said, SECOND NURSERY RHYME IS RECEIVED BY TRIBUNE. *Turned Over to Police; May Be Hoax.*

I went cold. The story said:

> A second nursery rhyme was delivered to the *Tribune* office late last night by a man who vanished after leaving it. It was thought that some connection between it and the Gosling murder might be in effect, and the note was turned over to Police Inspector Harry Rentano, who was of the opinion that some crackpot was trying to pull a hoax following the announcement of the Goosey Gander rhyme. The second rhyme went:
>
> *There was a monkey*
> *Climbed a tree.*
> *When he fell down*
> *Then down fell he.*

I gulped down the coffee and

hurriedly dressed. I was nearly ready when the telephone rang. I answered it. Susan Lathrop said, "Mr. Jones, would you do me a favor and lunch with me today? I've done some thinking and perhaps I may be able to help you after all."

"Lunch it is," I said. "I'll pick you up at Black, Moon and Black."

When she had hung up, I telephoned Centre Street and asked for Rentano. A voice said, "Hang up, Candid. This is better service than even you expected."

He was standing in the doorway, looking tired and harassed. I put the handset back.

Rentano kept his hat on but he sank into a chair and lighted a cigar. "Kiddo," he said, "we've got trouble."

"You're telling me," I said quietly. "I saw the *Tribune* this morning. That second note was no hoax. The rhyme about the monkey. I figured you handed out the hoax angle as a stall but it looked like the McCoy to me."

"It is the McCoy." Rentano waved a hand. "We found him."

"You found George Monk, the stumblebum who was carrying Goosey Goosey Gander around on Fifth Avenue."

"We found him."

"Where?"

"Under a tree in Bryant Park. He was all sprawled out there as though he'd fallen out of the tree. He didn't actually but the guy who killed him set the stage for the rhyme. The back of his head was bashed in, just like Gosling. A reporter from the *Chronicle* found him first, coming home from the lobster trick. Six A.M. He was killed some time during the night, probably shortly after midnight. Been dead at least five hours. That's what he got for earning an honest dollar."

"That's only part of it," I said. "That's what he got for having a last name like Monk." I stared at him and I felt a little numb. "You ought to be glad your name is Rentano. It isn't in a nursery rhyme."

Rentano frowned at me. "What are you getting at, Candid?"

"You're up against a guy who isn't going to stop," I said.

"You're crazy. Someone had a grudge against Gosling and bumped him and pulled the advertising stunt to make it mysterious. And then, when the killer realized that George Monk could identify him, he bumped him too and threw in the nursery rhyme for good measure."

"That makes sense," I said, "and yet it doesn't. You don't murder a man for a grudge. If you do it's got to be some grudge. Sure, Monk was killed because he could identify the killer—maybe. But why was Gosling killed? You can't find a motive. Everybody disliked the man and disliked his ideas but Gosling didn't do any more than preach atheism and his activities were very limited. He was even supposed to be on a radio program tonight with people who definitely didn't like him. Still, his name, no matter what it stood for, was big enough to be impressive."

"What are you trying to get at, Candid?"

"I'll tell you what," I said. "I've got a hunch, a very nasty hunch, and I don't like it. There is only one kind of killer who likes to be fancy and advertise his wares and be cute about murder. That's the egomaniacal mass murderer who thinks he's doing civilization a favor by knocking off the leprous spots on its face. That sounds deep but it isn't. Do you remember, in nineteen hundred and twenty I think, the guy who signed the notes calling himself the Public Avenger, and who named his victims in advance?"

"I remember."

"You caught that bird. And what was his trouble? His trouble was that he had an exaggerated ego, a terrific *'I'*, and he felt it was his duty to wipe off public scavengers of the type he did. You'll remember he picked only on crooks and tinhorns and known killers. Well, we're up against the same proposition here. I can feel it. It's not a personal motive we've got to look for—not a bit."

"You mean we're up against a maniac?"

"On the contrary. We're up against a brilliant man who has suddenly felt it his duty to wipe no-goods off the face of the earth. He'll have his own idea of no-goods. You might be no-good in his opinion. I might be. We've no way of telling."

"But that's no motive!" Rentano snapped. "A man can't just go kill a lot of people without something personal in it. He'd have to be crazy to do it."

"You're wrong." I pointed a finger at him. "Name me the most brilliant lawyer in the town."

"Oh, Phil Sanders, I guess. About as smart a lawyer as will ever show. Why?"

"Phil Sanders and I had a long talk one night, and we got on the subject of murder. Phil told me he was completely capable of murder and I said he was only gilding the lily. 'No, Candid,' he said slowly. 'I know that I would have no scruples at all about murder. In this world there are several hundred people I would like to murder. The only thing which holds me back from doing it is the fact that we have a law prohibiting the act and that I have sworn to uphold the law.

" 'But if there were not a law I would commit homicide upon the persons of many people without scruples, without remorse, without regret. And mark my words. Candid, some day you're going to meet a man with ideals who says to hell with the law and he'll start killing human lice and you won't stop him. He'll be a smart man.' I think Phil Sanders was right and that that is what we're up against now."

"You sound scared," Rentano jeered.

"I *am* scared," I said. "Jones is a name in many nursery rhymes."

"You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding," I said. "I'll stop being wary when you can point

out a guy and say he killed Gosling because of this or that. When you can do that, I'll let the jitters go. But until you do I'll shiver and I'll wait for the next nursery rhyme and hope it doesn't mean me. And I'll carry my Leica and my Luger with me from now on—just in case."

Rentano was silent for a moment. "You may be right," he said presently. "*I'm* certainly stymied. I haven't got a lead except that dame, Lathrop, and she doesn't know first base from home. Maybe you're right. But you don't act like yourself, Candid. Where's the hard-boiled shamus of Broadway? Old Ice-Water?"

I tapped my chest and said, "He's right here and he's being hard-boiled about living and dying. It's not nice to go through life when you know a man with a small bag of loose sand is waiting to slug you on the back of your head and write a nursery rhyme about it."

Rentano snapped his fingers. "The sack of sand! I meant to tell you. We think that's the weapon instead of a blackjack. A small bag with loose sand in the bottom of it. Like a sock with sand. It's a terrible weapon. Well, I'm heading downtown, kid. Want to come?"

"No. Stiffs look alike and I know how the monkey who fell out of a tree will look. I've got a date. I hope it will do some good."

"If you get anything let me know. I need everything I can lay my hands on. I need a meaty lead or I'm going to get in trouble myself." He waved solemnly and left.

III

At noontime I went down Fourth Avenue to the offices of Black, Moon and Black and I went armed. The nine-millimeter Luger pistol was in my shoulder holster, fully loaded, and beneath my coat, around my shoulder by strap was my Leica, at 1/50 lens 6.3 ready for anything. I felt furtive.

Black, Moon and Black were excellent publishers and they had nice little offices. I waited in the reception room until Susan Lathrop joined me and then we went downstairs to the Café Oriental on 28th Street. She was a nice-looking girl and I felt pretty good about being in her company.

We talked aimlessly while we ate lunch and I asked her about the book business, and she told me that Black, Moon and Black had published all of her uncle's works.

When we reached the coffee, she said, "There was a man who had a fight with Uncle Ernest one night. An actual fist-fight. It was some time ago. He's a novelist. Writes light things for us. His name is Walter Sterns. He's a hunchback, badly deformed. Brilliant man, but he uses his mind in light sarcasm against cynics in general. I don't know what was wrong but they fought and if it hadn't been for Mr. Turk, who separated them, it might have been serious. I saw it because I was just coming in but I went right upstairs."

"Tell me about Walter Sterns. I've read one or two of his books

and they're too amusingly bitter for me."

"Oh, he's an anarchist of sorts, believes in the overthrow of capital government by armed revolution. Rabid. I think he's a little bit mad. He's a strange man."

"And Turk?"

"That's Thomas Turk, who used to be something of a gangster in the prohibition era. Tommy-gun Turk they called him."

Well, that was more on the home grounds. I knew Tommy Turk well —well enough for him to avoid me. I laid a mouse under his eye once. I said, "And what the hell was Turk doing with Sterns and Gosling?"

"When prohibition went out Turk went literary. He wrote one book on the rackets and B.M. and B. published it and it made a lot of money. You're not up on the book field, are you, Mr. Jones?"

"No."

"Then Turk wrote another thing on running liquor off the Jersey coast and named a lot of big names, and that went pretty well too. After that he fancied himself quite a literary fellow and he chummed with the fiction crowd. No one had the nerve to tell him to stay away because he carried a gun and he was a pretty rough fellow. Everybody was afraid of him.

"Black, Moon and Black don't want any more of his stuff. They say it won't go any more. Rick Stacey was editor-in-chief then and he told me that gang stuff was dead, even if it was good. But they were all afraid to tell Turk that because he was so truculent. So they stalled him. It's been a long time."

I patted her hand. "You're a good gal," I said. "And you're scared. You're afraid of Turk, eh? He's made passes at you."

Susan nodded. "Yes, he has. He used to annoy me at the office and finally he came to the house. That's what he was doing there that night, I guess, waiting for me to come in."

"Rough stuff?" I said.

"He used to paw me a little. He's revolting. Rick Stacey caught him doing it up at B.M. and B. one day and told him to stop it. I thought Turk would hurt him. Rick isn't very strong, you know. But Turk left me alone for awhile, until Rick left B.M. and B. to be critic for the *Dispatch*."

I smiled. "Rick Stacey in love with you?"

"Oh, no," she said. "Oh, really no. Just an awfully nice chap who looked out for me a bit when I was new there. I'm not in love with anyone."

"That's good news," I said boldly. "And I promise you this. Turk won't bother you any more."

She stared at me curiously. "You talk as if you were certain. You don't know him."

"I do," I said. "And he knows me."

"And you're not afraid of him?"

I shrugged. "I used to be a flatfoot—a pretty hard-boiled sort of fish. I think, if fear is involved, it's quite the contrary. Turk is afraid of me."

She looked as though she couldn't

believe it. Which goes to show what a myth a plug-ugly can build up about himself. We had finished by then. "Well," she said, "I thought that little news might be some help. I wanted to help you, you've been so nice to me. Thank you for the lunch, Candid. I enjoyed it."

"No more than I," I said. "Let's do it again sometime. And by the way, I take it you listen to the Riddle-Me-This program?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'll be a Know-It-All tonight. Your friend Mr. Stacey asked me."

She smiled. "Then I'll listen tonight by all means." She said goodbye. I left her and returned to the studio. I hadn't been there more than a minute when the phone rang. It was Daffy Dill of the New York *Chronicle*.

"Hello, screwball," I said.

"Yea and verily," he said. "Wilt tell me, famed scoop artist of the Fourth Estate, what in the helleth is going on?"

"I don't know myself," I said.

"I've been through the nursery rhymes," he said, "and the only thing I can find on Daffy Dill is this lulu: *'Daffy down dilly has come up to town— In a white petticoat and a green gown.'* And that seems harmless enough so I guess I can sleep nights."

"Look," I said, "I'm busy."

"The old nudge, eh? Okay, pal, okay. But please don't forget I write a daily column on crime and anything in the way of news to add to it would be a boon to my readers, who are getting tired of my recipes for banana shortcake and would like some honest gore."

"I'll remember you, dipsy," I said, and hung up. It was a funny sort of commentary but you can see what I meant. Even a lead-slinger like Daffy Dill was worried.

I didn't have to ask Susan Lathrop to find out Tommy Turk's address. He owned the Hotel Marnier on West 43rd Street, a small hole in the world which didn't cater to much patronage in the old days but made a fine hideout and coverall for the activities of his gang. In the basement, he had a night spot with plenty of wheels, bird-cage, faro and the works. There wasn't an honest chance in the lot of that gambling stuff. Everything from magnetic roulette balls to luminous readers for his poker dealers. You were behind the eight-ball when you began.

When repeal came in Turk changed his hotel into a hotel. It housed various transients, mostly actors and chorines—small fry. I went over there at eight o'clock because it was near Radio City where the broadcast from WQRS would take place. I went up to the desk clerk and asked for Turk.

"Mr. Turk is out, sir," said the clerk.

"When did he go?"

"Before dinner, sir. Will you leave your name?"

"Never mind."

I turned around and came face to face with Willy Badger, who had been Turk's number one boy in the

old days. "Hello, Candid," he said easily. "What's the beef? Turk ain't been fooling with anything but the legit. He's an author now."

"I once told you," I said evenly, "not to speak to me unless I spoke to you first. The rules haven't changed."

He dropped his eyes. "I just thought I could help you out, Candid. Turk's gone over to the Casa Manana for dinner with a doll."

"Well, Willy," I said, "you've had a lot of luck. I didn't expect you'd still be alive. Slugs in your topper haven't caught up with you yet, eh? You're a lucky boy."

"I'm legit now."

"You're still a rat," I said. "You'll always be a rat. You tell Turk I'd like to see him. No cops. This is a private beef. You tell him. Tomorrow morning at nine A.M. or I come after him."

Willy Badger's eyes were fascinated by the bulk of my Luger beneath my coat. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I'll tell him."

I stared at him and he tipped his hat, and I left.

At Radio City, I took an elevator upstairs to the studios and a page boy directed me to my unit. It wasn't one of those huge sound stages where an audience sits and follows the signs. It was just a little room, hung with heavy curtains. There was a microphone in one corner. There was another on a table, and around the table were four chairs which faced forward. To one side, through the glass panel, you could see the sound engineer, the mixer, and a couple of spectators. Friends of Stacey's.

Rick Stacey was a small man. Oh, he was medium height, but he was terribly thin and kind of wispy, as though you could have blown him away. He wore glasses and his hair was sandy, and he looked quite wiry, even if thin. He had a pleasant smile. He didn't look healthy.

"You're a good sport, Jones"—he grinned—"to come on such short notice. I'm sure you'll make a fine addition. Are you nervous?"

"A little," I said. "I don't know why but the sight of that microphone makes your mouth dry."

"You'll be all right," he said. "I want you to meet your fellow Know-It-Alls tonight. This is Barton Townley, of the *Metropolitan,* and this is Jim McGuire, sports editor of the *Chronicle,* and this is the news commentator J. C. Cella. Meet Candid Jones, who puts his shots with a Leica and Luger where they will do the most good."

I'd known Mac of the *Chronicle* before and I knew he was a mental wizard. The other two birds, Cella and Townley, were all right. We all sat at the table and they kidded me a little to make me less nervous. They'd all been on the air before.

Well, you've heard Riddle-Me-This on the air yourself. You know what it's like, so I don't have to go into it. It consists merely of Stacey drawing questions which have been sent in by readers. These are the selected few of thousands. Stacey draws them out of a hat, tells who

sent the thingamajig in and springs it. If any of the Know-It-Alls can answer it, O.K. If not, ten bucks to the guy who sent it in.

At eight-thirty we went on the air, the announcer sounded off and I was sweating. Rick Stacey made his little speech and the fun began. It wasn't as bad as I thought. I skipped the first two questions, watching how the others worked and getting used to it, and then Stacey sprang the now notorious, "What famous sextet recently received world acclaim?" The other boys couldn't get it, so I said, "All the dwarfs except Dopey in Snow-white."

"Excellent!" Stacey cried. "I'll accept that!"

Just a flatfoot's flair for detail, I guess, for I missed simpler questions than that one. But after all, Dopey never said a word, so the seven dwarfs were a sextet when they sang. But when it came to, "Is an Indian a citizen of the United States?" I flunked, and McGuire of the *Chronicle,* who was a phenomenal fellow, answered it correctly.

Near the end of the program Stacey singled me out and said, "And now we'll let Mr. Jones handle this group of three on crime. Mother Goose crime—which has been in the news these last two days. Mr. Jones, as a detective, if you were called upon to arrest some one for poaching, whom, in Mother Goose, would you arrest?"

"Little Tommy Tittlemouse," I said. "That stuff about 'other men's ditches.' "

"Nice going!" said Townley. "That had me."

Anybody talks, you see. It's an informal program and we'd had no rehearsal.

"All right." Stacey smiled. "As a detective, you shadow people to keep track of their movements."

"Tailing them," I said.

"Can you give me an instance in Mother Goose where an attempt was made to tail—as you put it—a criminal?"

"Well," I said, "that mob of mice got together once to try and tag a bell on the cat who'd been killing them. Mean that?"

"I do mean that and I'll accept that! Gentlemen, Mr. Jones puts you all to shame. Two out of three so far and no losses. And the final question, Candid Jones."

"Keep going while I'm hot," I grinned. I was enjoying it. It was so informal you forgot a lot of people were listening from Oregon to Maine.

"I want you to give me three characters in Mother Goose who had a hard time of it. One was cut off from the light of day, one burst, and one cracked wide open."

That was a little harder because it was a tricky question. I finally said, "Burst? You mean the weasel that went Pop?"

"I do. I've always understood the weasel spoke the word Pop, but the sender of the question seems to think it means the weasel exploded. Go ahead."

"Cut off from the light of day," I said. "Well, that one about the old woman who stuck a turkey in the sack."

"Correct."

"And Humpty-Dumpty cracked wide open when he fell."

"Absolutely right!" Stacey said enthusiastically. "One hundred percent. And that's about all we have time for tonight, ladies and gentlemen. The Know-It-Alls had a good score tonight and my sponsor, bless his heart, is out a mere twenty dollars. Good night everyone."

We were off the air. We sat there talking the thing over and Stacey said he'd like me back on the program again the following week. Meanwhile the music of the following program was coming into the studio and it was suddenly interrupted. "Ladies and gentlemen. We interrupt this program of dance music to bring you a special bulletin from the Press Radio Bureau, New York. The Mother Goose killer struck again tonight. At seven-thirty P.M. a nursery jingle was delivered to the offices of the New York *Chronicle*. It said, *'All around the cobbler's bench— The monkey chased the weasel. The monkey thought 'twas all in fun. POP goes the weasel.'*

"At the same time, the Press Radio Bureau received a jingle as follows. *'A woman had a turkey, turkey, turkey— She put him in a sack, in a sack, in a sack. O my little turkey, turkey, turkey, How do you like it in the sack, in the sack?'*

"At eight o'clock tonight, New York police reported the murders of Willy Badger, notorious lieutenant of a gang of prohibition days, and his boss, Thomas A. (Tommy-Gun) Turk, one of the richest gangsters alive.

"There was little doubt that the 'weasel' rhyme was meant to mean Badger, nor that the 'turkey' referred to was meant to be Turk. Badger met his death by a sharp blow on the back of the head, in the same manner that Ernest Gosling and George Monk died. Badger was found in an alley behind the Hotel Marnier. He had been pushed out an eighth story window.

"The audacity of the murderer in announcing his victim before Badger had even died angered police. Thomas Turk was found only ten minutes ago in a potato sack, lying below the West Side Express Highway. He had been dead for hours.

"New York Inspector Harry Rentano issued a warning to the city tonight to keep off the streets after dark and be careful of strangers. 'We are up against a mass killer,' he said. 'He may not be a madman necessarily but his mind is warped enough to think it his duty to rid the world of people whom he personally dislikes. Don't take any chances.' This is the Press Radio Bureau. Further bulletins—"

I got up and went over to Stacey and said, "Let me have that Mother Goose slip you used tonight."

Stacey went through the pile and got it out and handed it to me. It was typewritten, as they all were,

and it had been submitted by a guy named Harry Morich of Lexington Street, Boston. I asked, "Who makes these slips up from the incoming questions?"

"Laney," said Stacey. "He's program director. Candid, you don't think this has anything to do with what happened tonight—"

"It's no coincidence," I said.

"But this had Humpty-Dumpty too and there's no connection—"

"You know Walter Sterns?"

"Yes, of course."

"Call him. See if he's all right."

Stacey nodded and left. McGuire of the *Chronicle* said, "Well, one thing about this Mother Goose man. He sure gets rid of lice. He hasn't bumped a soul yet that was worth a nickel."

"There's a law," I said. "Murder. He might think sportswriters were parasites and pick on you next. You wouldn't like that."

McGuire looked rueful. "It doesn't appeal to me."

Townley said, "So far he has picked on people he thinks the world is better without. Now in the event that you reach a point where you can prevent his killings, will he feel that the world would be better off without someone like yourself?"

"He'd bump me in self-defense," I said, "if I got too close."

Stacey was back. "No word from Sterns at all. No answer."

"Doesn't he have a wife, a maid, a butler, anyone?" I asked.

"No. He lives in the Village alone."

"Where?"

"Twenty-three Abingdon Square."

I went out and telephoned Harry Rentano but they told me he was over at the Hotel Marnier, cleaning up. I left the studio and caught a cab to the Marnier. He was sweating, he was mad and he was worried. "I don't think you're finished for the night," I told him.

Rentano snapped, "What now?"

"Humpty-Dumpty," I said. "Walter Sterns was a hunchback. Did you hear the Riddle-Me-This program? Three rhymes tonight. Two of them have had their options taken up. We'll look into Humpty-Dumpty right now."

We did, and I was not at all surprised. In his small apartment at number 23 Abingdon Square, Walter Sterns, the hunchback of Greenwich Village, sat in a chair, dead, the back of his skull crushed by a heavy blow. It was easy to see he had been dead for six hours or more.

Rentano looked at me and said, "Candid—I'm afraid."

IV

There was one thing I could not believe. I could not believe that a man, such as you or I, who had been living a perfectly sane and normal life, could suddenly go wacky enough to give Mother Goose the works.

Now in the morning *Tribune* we got our first lead from the killer himself. There was a letter from him on the first page—

Sirs: A lot of speculation is going the rounds as to the identity of the Mother Goose murderer and to the motive for these crimes. As the party in question I would like to enlighten both the police and the newspapers on one point. There is nothing personal involved in these crimes. Some time before he dies a man likes to make a gesture of good will to the world he has lived in. The Mother Goose murders are my gesture. For a long time I have seen human beings not worthy of the name. It seemed to me that such folk would be better dead. That alone is the motive. Yours very truly, The Mother Goose Man.

Get a load of that. The killer writing to a newspaper to give his motives and assure the populace. Some going, eh? But for me, there was a lead. That sentence, "Some time before he dies a man likes to make a gesture of good will."

Investigation of the Boston address of Harry Morich, who had sent in the nursery rhymes to Riddle-Me-This, proved one thing —the Boston police said there was no such address and there was no such person. I knew that already, for the typing on the submitted rhymes was identical with those of the nursery rhymes received around the town. A talk with Laney of NBS proved fruitless.

Humpty-Dumpty gave Rentano and me a lead. The night before, when we had gone through his things, we found some letters to him. What we were particularly interested in was the one with the same type face as the Harry Morich nursery question. Elite type with a *th* that ran together.

It was on the paper of Black, Moon and Black. Susan Lathrop told me that the type was very familiar. "Seems to me I had a machine in my desk like that," she said. "But something went wrong with it and B. M. and B. sold it and got me a new one."

"Know where they sold it?"

"I know the place."

I took Susan with me and we went down to the Acme Typewriter Shop and we asked them about it.

The manager said, "I remember it—a Remington. We sold that machine reconditioned. There's no record of a name, so it went for cash. A long time ago—six months, according to these books."

Well, there were still leads.

I took Susan Lathrop to lunch. She was a nice kid and we were getting along. "It seems so hopeless," she said. "A man murdering people because he doesn't think they're any good. They're so scattered. Isn't it terribly hard to tie them together?"

"Susan," I said, "every one of those dead men had one thing in common."

"What?"

"They all worked for Black, Moon and Black."

"No, they didn't," she said. "Not George Monk."

"He's the only one. Willy Badger

worked for Turk, and that means he delivered manuscripts and was known to the B. M. and B. staff. Sterns wrote for the firm, Gosling wrote for the firm, Turk himself wrote for the firm."

"I remember once a long time ago," she said. "When I first came to the firm. I remember someone saying, at an editorial meeting, that the list of Black, Moon and Black writers read like a list of characters out of Mother Goose."

That electrified me. "Can you remember who said it?"

"I've forgotten."

"Look. Can you get me a list of the B. M. and B. writers and give me your own opinion of the kind of people you think they are?"

Susan said, "Right away?"

"Right away," I said. "And if you'll be a good girl and bring the list up to my studio tonight I'll take you out to dinner."

"Done."

After I left her I went back to the studio. But when I got home I found a note tacked on the door. It was in an envelope. I took it down and went inside where I opened it and read it. It said,

Don't crowd me. When you try to stop me from exterminating rats, you put yourself in their class. The end justifies the means. Mother Goose Man.

—

Well, I'd had a lot of threats in my time, but I didn't like this one. I don't mind shooting it out with a crook. But I'll be damned if I liked the stealthy efficient way the Mother Goose Man accomplished what he said he'd do.

I telephoned Harry Rentano and said, "Had any personal threats?"

"No," Rentano said. "Have you?"

"I have. I must be getting warm."

"Well, I'm not. I'm colder than an Eskimo potato! The Commissioner is taking my head off."

"What are you doing?"

He grunted out a series of unintelligible sounds.

"I see," I said dryly. "Well, I'll give you a buzz if I walk into anything."

"Don't walk into the Mother Goose Man," said Rentano heavily.

Then I got my first break. I hadn't been home more than ten minutes when the buzzer sounded and Susan Lathrop opened the door.

"Candid!" she said breathlessly.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"I've a clue. An honest-to-goodness clue! That typewriter—I've found it!"

"You have? How and where?"

"Well, that machine wasn't mine. Yet I'd seen that elite type somewhere. I looked in my medicine chest and I found it. A bottle of medicine with the label and typewriting on the label."

"A druggist?"

"No. It isn't a prescription. It's a vitamin-D thing that Dr. Robin made up specially for me."

"And who is Dr. Robin?"

"He's my doctor. He has an office over on Park Avenue near Fiftieth

Street. I telephoned him right away and asked about his machine, and he said he picked it up at the Acme Typewriter Shop."

"Nice work," I said. "And what about Dr. Robin?"

"He's swell," said Susan. "All—well—most of the B. M. and B. authors use him. That's how I got to know him. Townley, Sterns, Stacey—even Uncle Ernest."

I said, "Did you bring that list?"

"I did. It's not complete but it's the best I could do on short notice. The firm had this printed up at Christmas to impress the dealers."

As she handed me the list of authors, her gray eyes flicked over my shoulder, past me at the door. I dived at her and slashed her to the floor as a gun cracked. My ears buzzed from the concussion, it was that close. Over our heads the plaster chipped where the bullet hit.

There was no second shot from the door. I was pulling on the Luger when I fell, and after I hit I whirled on my left side and started firing. We could see the bullets splinter the door. Then I got up and started running. But when I got to the door, there was nothing.

When I went back upstairs I couldn't get my breath. The closeness of it had me panting.

Susan looked as if she would faint. "Telephone," she gasped. "For you. Oh, Candid—"

I kissed her. I couldn't help it. "You saved my life, kid," I said. "Thanks for that." Then I stared at her. What the hell, I thought. Love finds Candid Jones?

"The telephone," Susan said in a whisper. "The Inspector—"

I went to the telephone. "Hello, Harry? This is Candid."

Rentano snapped, "Are you okay?"

"Sure!"

"Miss Lathrop told me you'd been shot at!"

"Just now!"

"The guy didn't waste time. We received a pair of nursery rhymes from the *Chronicle* just ten minutes ago. Two more coming up, only it looks like one missed."

"You mean me?"

"Here's your rhyme. *'Mr. Jones had ideas— Running through his head. He picked up one too many— So his head is full of lead.'* "

"That's no nursery rhyme!" I snapped. "That one was knocked off special for the occasion to explain why I was getting the slug! What's the other one?"

"The other one is *'I' said the sparrow—with my bow and arrow—'* "

I finished, "*—I killed Cock Robin!* Harry! I can't talk! I've got to tear! I can stop this one!" I slashed up the handset and grabbed Susan. "Quick, kid," I roared. "Take me to your Dr. Robin! He's up next for extermination!"

Susan got the point and the next thing we were in a cab and roaring over to Park Avenue disregarding light and cops.

Kind of an anti-climax—I mean to dash into a place to save a man's life, and to find him alive and

well. He was a kindly looking man with a gray mustache and a stethoscope around his neck.

"My dear Susan," he said placidly. "You're all upset."

"Oh, Doctor," Susan cried, "someone is trying to kill you! This is Candid Jones."

"My dear, you're distraught. Let me give you something—"

"Dr. Robin," I snapped. "She's upset because someone just tried to kill me. That someone has you billed next. You've read the papers, and you know about the Mother Goose murders?

"You alone know the man who is spreading that reign of terror. Someone who had use of your typewriter long enough to write out a series of rhymes. Someone who is a patient of yours, understand? He's doomed. He can't live. He's hopelessly sick. You've proved to him that his days are numbered.

"That patient of yours has used your machine for the death notes. He has nothing against you except that you are the only one who—unconsciously—can name him when the proper time comes. And because I know that, he tried to kill me. And because you can tell he means to kill you."

"You must understand him," Susan cried.

"I do, I think," Dr. Robin said slowly. "You mean that I have pronounced a patient incurable. You think that man is the murderer in this ghastly set of crimes?"

"I know he is!" I groaned. "Will you tell me his name?"

"I'm sorry," Dr. Robin said stiffly. "I cannot. My ethical code prevents me."

"Hell with your code! There are lives at stake."

"I'm sorry—"

I pulled out the Luger and said, "All right, you asked for it. I'm going through those files if I have to cover every single case—"

Dr. Robin's office was on the ground floor with windows so that pedestrians could look in. There were curtains but they were transparent. I stopped talking because a shadow fell across one of the windows. The window was open at the top. Where I stood, with Susan at my side, we were cut off from the line of view.

I put my hand over Susan's mouth and told her to be still. I watched. Presently, a hand stole in over the top of that open window. We could see it very plainly. Dr. Robin, staring at us, was completely unaware of it. In the hand was the same gun which had spat a slug at me not thirty minutes before.

Then I fired. My shot went through the window and hit the Mother Goose Man low in the body. The shadow dropped from the window.

Susan Lathrop and Dr. Robin stood there, petrified, but I was on my way. I reached Park, went around the corner like a sprinter and came upon him, still by the window, sitting there and holding

his side and looking as if it hurt.

I picked him up and took him into Dr. Robin's office, and said, "Here is a patient. He tried to kill you—but you'll work like hell to save his life."

I set him down on the surgical table. Dr. Robin came over and told Susan to stay outside and then he ripped the shirt open.

Rick Stacey pushed him away. "Let me alone, please, Doctor," Stacey said. "You can't save the life of a man who is already dead."

I said, "He was the one, then?"

Stacey looked at me and smiled as his wound hurt. "Yes, Candid, I was the one. Tubercular—he told me I didn't have six months. Oh, with care and rest and Arizona, perhaps longer. But definitely no cure. Caught it too late—six months. "I suppose you think I'm a madman."

"No," I said. "Not a madman. Just an awfully soreheaded guy. Burned you up to see other people live when you knew you had to die. People you didn't think had as much right to live as you."

"Exactly," he panted. "Believe me, Candid, I regretted having to take you and Dr. Robin. But I had to, or I wouldn't have lasted. You were a better detective than I bargained for."

"He won't die," Dr. Robin said.

Stacey said, "Sorry to disappoint you, but I have no intention of being tried by my peers in a criminal court, Doctor. Sorry too, Candid, that I won't be at the Riddle-Me-This program next week to welcome you. But even Burns said the best laid plans of mice and men—" His hand shot to his mouth, and in an instant it was over, all over.

I shouted wildly and grabbed for him, and the smell of bitter almonds was in the air, and Dr. Robin shrieked, *"Potassium cyanide!"*

In his pockets I found a sheaf of rhymes. The *Jack and Jill* rhyme was there, the *King of France* who went up the hill and did not come down again, several others. All typed on the same machine. Dr. Robin explained that. The day he told Stacey the sick man had asked to be left alone to think it over. He could have used the machine then and typed all the rhymes.

I learned later that my rhyme of Mr. Jones had been done from words clipped from a newspaper. Urgent, you see, and no chance for him to use the same machine.

In the list Susan had given me, of B. M. and B. authors, I found many potential victims. Louis King, the strange Freudian poet. King Louis, see, the King of France? John and Jill Thompson, the satirists. And others, many others.

Wearily I went to the telephone and called Rentano at headquarters. "Harry," I said, "it's all over."

Rentano could not believe it.

"It's all over," I repeated. "You come up to this address and pick up the body."

"I'm on my way."

I hung up and went back to Susan Lathrop.

the face of helen

by . . . . . Agatha Christie

To be supremely beautiful sets a woman above the less blessed. It may also, as Gillian West discovers, make her a mark for murder.

MR. SATTERTHWAITE was at the opera and sat alone in his big box on the first tier. Outside the door was a printed card bearing his name. An appreciator and connoisseur of all the arts, Mr. Satterthwaite was especially fond of good music and was a regular subscriber to Covent Garden every year, reserving a box for Tuesdays and Fridays throughout the season.

But it was not often that he sat in it alone. He was a gregarious little gentleman and he liked filling his box with the aristocracy of the artistic world in which he was equally at home. He was alone tonight because a countess had disappointed him.

The countess, besides being a beautiful and celebrated woman, was also a good mother. Her children had been attacked by that common and distressing disease, the mumps, and the countess remained at home in tearful confabulation with exquisitely starched nurses. Her husband, who had supplied her with the aforementioned children and a title, but who was otherwise a complete nonentity, had seized at the chance to escape. Nothing bored him more than music.

So Mr. Satterthwaite was alone. *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*

Agatha Christie is something of an international triple-cross—an American-born woman who writes in England and whose most famous fictional character is French! Yet Hercule Poirot is but one in a gallery of notable detectives to have sprung from Mrs. Christie's typewriter during more than three writing decades. Here, in Mr. Satterthwaite and Mr. Quin, we meet two more unforgettable members of the Christie Homicide Bureau, able ts solve riddles with Hercule Poirot himself.

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were being given that night, and since the first had never appealed to him he arrived just after the curtain went down on Santuzza's death agony in time to glance round the house with a practiced eye, before every one streamed out.

Mr. Satterthwaite adjusted his opera glasses, looked round the house, marked down his prey and sallied forth with a well mapped out plan of campaign ahead of him. A plan, however, which he did not put into execution, for just outside his box he cannoned into a tall dark man and recognized him with a pleasurable thrill of excitement.

"Mr. Quin!" cried Mr. Satterthwaite.

He seized his friend warmly by the hand, clutching him as though he feared any minute to see him vanish into thin air.

"You must share my box," said Mr. Satterthwaite determinedly. "You are not with a party?"

"No, I am sitting by myself in the stalls," said Mr. Quin with a smile.

"Then it is settled," said Mr. Satterthwaite with a sigh of relief. His manner was almost comic, had there been any one to observe it.

"You are very kind," said Mr. Quin.

"Not at all. It is a pleasure. I didn't know you were fond of music."

"There are reasons why I am attracted to—*Pagliacci*."

"Ah, of course!" said Mr. Satterthwaite, nodding sapiently, though, if put to it, he would have found it hard to explain just why he had used that expression. "Of course, you would be."

They went back to the box at the first summons of the bell and, leaning over the front of it, they watched the people returning to the stalls.

"That's a beautiful head," observed Mr. Satterthwaite suddenly.

He indicated with his glasses a spot immediately beneath them in the stalls circle. A girl sat there whose face they could not see—only the pure gold of her hair that fitted with the closeness of a cap till it merged into the white neck.

"A Greek head," said Mr. Satterthwaite reverently. "Pure Greek." He sighed happily. "It's a remarkable thing when you come to think of it—how very few people have hair that *fits* them. It's more noticeable now that every one is shingled."

"You are so observant," said Mr. Quin.

"I see things," admitted Mr. Satterthwaite. "I do see things. For instance, I picked out that head at once. We must have a look at her face sooner or later. But it won't match, I'm sure. That would be a chance in a thousand."

Almost as the words left his lips, the lights flickered and went down, the sharp rap of the conductor's baton was heard and the opera began. A new tenor, said to be a second Caruso, was singing that night.

He had been referred to by the newspapers as a Jugoslav, a Czech,

an Albanian, a Magyar and a Bulgarian, with a beautiful impartiality. He had given an extraordinary concert at the Albert Hall, a program of the folk songs of his native hills with a specially tuned orchestra. They were in strange half-tones and the would-be musical had pronounced them "*too* marvelous."

Real musicians had reserved judgment, realizing that the ear had to be specially trained and attuned before any criticism was possible. It was quite a relief to some people to find this evening that Yoaschbim could sing in ordinary Italian with all the traditional sobs and quivers.

The curtain went down on the first act and applause burst out vociferously. Mr. Satterthwaite turned to Mr. Quin. He realized that the latter was waiting for him to pronounce judgment and plumed himself a little. After all, he *knew*. As a critic he was nigh infallible.

Very slowly he nodded his head. "It is the real thing," he said.

"You think so?"

"As fine a voice as Caruso's. People will not recognize that it is so at first, for his technique is not yet perfect. There are ragged edges, a lack of certainty in the attack. But the voice is there—magnificent!"

"I went to his concert at the Albert Hall," said Mr. Quin.

"Did you? I could not go."

"He made a wonderful hit with the *Shepherd's Song*."

"I read about it," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "The refrain ends each time with a high note—a kind of cry. A note midway between A and B-flat. Very curious."

Yoaschbim had taken three calls, bowing and smiling. The lights went up and the people began to file out. Mr. Satterthwaite leaned over to watch the girl with the golden head. She rose, adjusted her scarf and turned.

Mr. Satterthwaite caught his breath. There were, he knew, such faces in the world—faces that made history . . .

The girl moved to the gangway, her companion, a young man, beside her. And Mr. Satterthwaite noticed how every man in the vicinity looked—and continued to look covertly.

"Beauty!" said Mr. Satterthwaite to himself. "There is such a thing. Not charm nor attraction nor magnetism nor any of the things we talk about so glibly—just sheer beauty. The shape of a face, the line of an eyebrow, the curve of a jaw."

He quoted softly under his breath, "*The face that launched a thousand ships*." And for the first time he realized its meaning.

He glanced across at Mr. Quin, who was watching him in what seemed such perfect comprehension that Mr. Satterthwaite felt there was no need of words.

"I've always wondered," he said simply, "what such women were really like."

"You mean?"

"The Helens, the Cleopatras, the Mary Stuarts."

Mr. Quin nodded his assent thoughtfully.

"If we go out," he suggested, "we may—see."

They went out together and their quest was successful.

* * * * *

The pair they were in search of were seated on a lounge halfway up the staircase. For the first time Mr. Satterthwaite noted the girl's companion, a dark young man, not handsome, but with a suggestion of restless fire about him. A face full of strange angles—jutting cheek bones, a forceful slightly crooked jaw, deep-set eyes that were curiously light under the dark overhanging brows.

"An interesting face," said Mr. Satterthwaite to himself. "A real face. It means something."

The young man was leaning forward, talking earnestly. The girl was listening. Neither of them belonged to Mr. Satterthwaite's world. He took them to be of the "arty" class. The girl wore a rather shapeless garment of cheap green silk. Her shoes were of soiled white satin. The young man wore his evening clothes with an air of being uncomfortable in them.

The two men passed and repassed several times. The fourth time they did so the couple had been joined by a third—a fair young man with a suggestion of a clerk about him. With his coming a certain tension had set in. The newcomer was fidgeting with his tie and seemed ill at ease, the girl's beautiful face was turned gravely up toward him, her companion was scowling furiously.

"The usual story," said Mr. Quin very softly as they passed.

"Yes," said Mr. Satterthwaite with a sigh. "It's inevitable I suppose. The snarling of two dogs over a bone. It always has been, it always will be. And yet, one could wish for something different. Beauty . . ." He stopped. Beauty, to Mr. Satterthwaite, meant something very wonderful. He found it difficult to speak of it. He looked at Mr. Quin, who nodded his head gravely in understanding.

They went back to their seats for the second act.

At the close of the performance, Mr. Satterthwaite turned eagerly to his friend. "It is a wet night. My car is here. You must allow me to drive you—er—somewhere."

The last word was Mr. Satterthwaite's delicacy coming into play. "To drive you home," would, he felt, have savored of curiosity. Mr. Quin had always been singularly reticent. It was extraordinary how little Mr. Satterthwaite knew about him.

"But perhaps," continued the little man, "you have your own car waiting?"

"No," said Mr. Quin. "I have no car waiting."

"Then . . ."

But Mr. Quin shook his head.

"You are most kind," he said, "but I prefer to go my own way. Besides," he added with a rather curious smile, "if anything should —happen—it will be for you to

act. Good night and thank you. Once again we have seen the drama together."

He was gone so quickly that Mr. Satterthwaite had no time to protest, but he was left with a faint uneasiness stirring in his mind. To what drama did Mr. Quin refer—*Pagliacci* or another?

Masters, Mr. Satterthwaite's chauffeur, was in the habit of waiting in a side street. His master disliked the long delay while the cars drew up in turn before the opera house. Now, as on previous occasions, he walked rapidly round the corner and along the street toward where he knew he should find Masters awaiting him. Just in front of him were a girl and a man and even as he recognized them another man joined them.

It all broke out in a minute. A man's voice, angrily uplifted. Another man's voice in injured protest. And then the scuffle. Blows, angry breathing, more blows, the form of a policeman appearing majestically from nowhere—and in another instant Mr. Satterthwaite was beside the girl where she shrank back.

"Allow me," he said. "You must not stay here."

He took her by the arm and marshaled her swiftly down the street. Once she looked back.

"Oughtn't I . . ." she began uncertainly. Mr. Satterthwaite shook his head. "It would be very unpleasant for you to be mixed up in it. You would probably be asked to go along to the police station with them. I am sure neither of your—friends—would wish that."

He stopped. Then, "This is my car. If you will allow me to do so I shall have much pleasure in driving you home."

The girl looked at him searchingly. The staid respectability of Mr. Satterthwaite impressed her favorably. She bent her head. "Thank you," she said and got into the car, the door of which Masters was holding open.

In reply to a question from Mr. Satterthwaite she gave him an address in Chelsea and he got in beside her.

The girl was upset and not in the mood for talking and Mr. Satterthwaite was too tactful to intrude upon her thoughts. Presently, however, she turned to him and spoke of her own accord.

"I wish," she said pettishly, "people wouldn't be so silly."

"It *is* a nuisance," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite. His matter-of-fact manner put her to her ease and she went on as though feeling the need of confiding in someone.

"It isn't as though—I mean, well, it's like this. Mr. Eastney and I have been friends for a long time—ever since I came to London. He's taken no end of trouble about my voice and got me some very good introductions. He's been more kind to me than I can say.

"He's absolutely music-mad. It was very good of him to take me tonight. I'm sure he can't really afford it. And then Mr. Burns came up and spoke to us—quite nicely,

I'm sure—and Phil, Mr. Eastney, got sulky about it.

"I don't know why he should. It's a free country, I'm sure. And Mr. Burns is always pleasant and good tempered. Then, just as we were walking to the tube, he came up and joined us and he hadn't so much as said two words before Philip flew out at him like a madman. And—*oh!* I don't like it."

"Don't you?" asked Mr. Satterthwaite very softly.

She blushed but very little. There was none of the conscious siren about her. A certain measure of pleasurable excitement in being fought for there must be—that was only nature. But Mr. Satterthwaite decided that a worried perplexity lay uppermost. He had the clew to it in another moment when she observed inconsequently, "I hope he hasn't hurt him."

"Now which is 'him'?" thought Mr. Satterthwaite, smiling to himself in the darkness. He backed his own judgment and said, "You hope Mr.—er—Eastney hasn't hurt Mr. Burns?"

She nodded. "Yes, that's what I said. It seems so dreadful. I wish I knew."

The car was drawing up. "Have you a telephone?" he asked.

"Yes."

"If you like, I'll find out exactly what has happened and then call you."

The girl's face brightened. "Oh! That would be very kind of you. Are you sure it's not too much bother?"

"Not in the least," he told her.

She thanked him again and gave him her telephone number, adding with a touch of shyness, "My name is Gillian West."

As he was driven through the night, bound on his errand, a curious smile came to Mr. Satterthwaite's lips. He thought, so that is all it is —*the shape of a face, the curve of a jaw!*

But he fulfilled his promise.

* * * * *

The following Sunday afternoon Mr. Satterthwaite went to Kew Gardens to admire the rhododendrons. Very long ago—incredibly long ago, it seemed to Mr. Satterthwaite—he had driven down to Kew Gardens with a certain young lady to see the bluebells.

Mr. Satterthwaite had arranged very carefully beforehand in his own mind exactly what he was going to say, the precise words he would use in asking the young lady for her hand in marriage. He was just conning them over in his mind and responding to her raptures about the bluebells a little absent-mindedly when the shock came.

The young lady stopped exclaiming at the bluebells and suddenly confided in Mr. Satterthwaite—as a true friend—her love for another. Mr. Satterthwaite put away the little set speech he had prepared and hastily rummaged for sympathy and friendship in the bottom drawer of his mind.

Such was Mr. Satterthwaite's romance—a rather tepid early Vic-

torian one—but it had left him with a romantic attachment to Kew Gardens. Occasionally he liked to go there to see the bluebells or, if he had been abroad later than usual, the rhododendrons. There he would sigh to himself and feel rather sentimental and really enjoy himself very much indeed in an old-fashioned way.

This particular afternoon he was strolling back past the teahouses when he recognized a couple sitting at one of the small tables on the grass. They were Gillian West and the fair young man and at that same moment they recognized him.

He saw the girl flush and speak eagerly to her companion. In another moment he was shaking hands with them both in his correct rather-prim fashion and had accepted the shy invitation proffered him to have tea with them.

"I can't tell you, sir," said Mr. Burns, "how grateful I am to you for looking after Gillian the other night. She told me all about it."

"Yes, indeed," said the girl. "It was ever so kind of you."

Mr. Satterthwaite felt pleased and interested in the pair. Their *naïveté* and sincerity touched him. Also it was to him a peep into a world with which he was not well acquainted. These people were of a class unknown to him.

In his rather dried-up way, Mr. Satterthwaite could be very sympathetic. Very soon he was hearing all about his new friends. He noted that Mr. Burns had become Charlie and he was not unprepared for the statement that the two were engaged.

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Burns with refreshing candor, "it just happened this afternoon. Didn't it, Gil?"

Burns was a clerk in a shipping firm. He was making a fair salary, had a little money of his own and the two proposed to be married quite soon.

Mr. Satterthwaite listened, and nodded and congratulated.

"An ordinary young man," he thought to himself, "a very ordinary young man. Nice straightforward young chap, plenty to say for himself, good opinion of himself without being conceited, nice looking without being unduly handsome. Nothing remarkable about him and will never set the Thames on fire. And the girl loves him."

Aloud he said, "And Mr. Eastney . . ."

He purposely broke off but he had said enough to produce an effect for which he was not unprepared. Charlie Burns's face darkened and Gillian looked troubled. More than troubled, he thought.

"I don't like it," she said in a low voice. Her words were addressed to Mr. Satterthwaite, as though she knew by instinct that he would understand a feeling incomprehensible to her lover.

"You see—he's done a lot for me. He's encouraged me to take up singing and—and helped me with it. But I've known all the time that my voice wasn't really good—not

first-class. Of course, I've had engagements . . ."

She stopped.

"You've had a bit of trouble too," said Burns. "A girl wants someone to look after her. Gillian's had a lot of unpleasantness, Mr. Satterthwaite —a *lot* of unpleasantness. She's good looking, as you can see, and—well, that often leads to trouble for a girl."

Between them, Mr. Satterthwaite became enlightened as to various happenings which were vaguely classed by Burns under the heading of "unpleasantness." The young man who had shot himself, the extraordinary conduct of the bank manager—who was a married man —the violent stranger—who must have been balmy—and the wild behavior of the elderly artist.

A trail of violence and tragedy that Gillian West had left in her wake, recited in the commonplace tones of Charlie Burns. "And it's my opinion," he ended, "that this fellow Eastney is a bit cracked. Gillian would have had trouble with him if I hadn't turned up to look after her."

His laugh sounded a little fatuous to Mr. Satterthwaite and no responsive smile came to the girl's face. She was looking earnestly at Mr. Satterthwaite.

"Phil's all right," she said slowly. "He cares for me, I know, and I care for him like a friend—but—but not anything more. I don't know how he'll take the news about Charlie, I'm sure. He—I'm so afraid he'll be . . ."

She stopped, inarticulate in face of the dangers she vaguely sensed.

"If I can help you in any way," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "pray command me."

He fancied Charlie Burns looked vaguely resentful but Gillian said at once, "Thank you."

Mr. Satterthwaite left his new friends after having promised to take tea with Gillian on the following Thursday.

When Thursday came, Mr. Satterthwaite felt a little thrill of pleasurable anticipation. He thought, "I am an old man—but not too old to be thrilled by a face. A face . . ." Then he shook his head with a sense of foreboding.

Gillian was alone. Charlie Burns was to come in later. She looked much happier, Mr. Satterthwaite thought, as though a load had been lifted from her mind. Indeed, she frankly admitted as much.

"I dreaded telling Phil about Charlie. It was silly of me. I ought to have known Phil better. He was upset, of course, but no one could have been sweeter. Really sweet he was. Look what he sent me this morning—a wedding present. Isn't it magnificent?"

It was indeed rather magnificent for a young man in Philip Eastney's circumstances. A four-tube radio set of the lastest type.

"We both love music so much, you see," said the girl. "Phil said that when I was listening to a concert on this I should always think of him a little. And I'm sure I shall—because we have been such

friends—such very good friends."

"You must be proud of your friend," said Mr. Satterthwaite gently. "He seems to have taken the blow like a true sportsman."

Gillian nodded.

"He asked me to do one thing for him. Tonight is the anniversary of the day we first met. He asked me if I would stay at home quietly this evening and listen to the radio program—not go out with Charlie anywhere. I said, of course, I would and that I was very touched and that I would think of him with a lot of gratitude and affection."

Mr. Satterthwaite nodded, but he was puzzled. He was seldom at fault in his delineations of character and he would have judged Philip Eastney quite incapable of such a sentimental request.

Gillian evidently thought the idea quite in keeping with her rejected lover's character. Mr. Satterthwaite was a little—just a little—disappointed. He was sentimental himself and knew it but he expected better things of the rest of the world.

He asked Gillian to sing and she complied. He told her her voice was charming but he knew quite well in his own mind that it was distinctly second-class.

He was not particularly anxious to see young Burns again, so presently he rose to go. It was at that moment that his attention was attracted by an ornament on the mantelpiece which stood out among the other rather gimcrack objects like a jewel on a dust heap.

It was a curving beaker of thin green glass, long-stemmed and graceful, and poised on the edge of it was what looked like a gigantic soap bubble, a ball of iridescent glass. Gillian noticed his absorption.

"That's an extra wedding present from Phil. It's rather pretty, I think. He works in a sort of glass factory."

"It's a beautiful thing," said Mr. Satterthwaite reverently. "The glass blowers of Murano might have been proud of that."

He went away with his interest in Philip Eastney strangely stimulated. An extraordinarily intriguing young man. And yet the girl with the wonderful face preferred Charlie Burns. What a strange and inscrutable universe!

It had just occurred to Mr. Satterthwaite that owing to the remarkable beauty of Gillian West his evening with Mr. Quin had somehow missed fire.

It was with the hope of perhaps running across the man of mystery that Mr. Satterthwaite bent his steps toward the *Arlecchino* Restaurant, where once in days gone by he had met Mr. Quin and which Mr. Quin had said he often frequented.

Mr. Satterthwaite went from room to room at the *Arlecchino*, but no sign of Mr. Quin's dark smiling face. There was, however, somebody else. Sitting alone at a small table was Philip Eastney.

* * * * *

The place was crowded and Mr. Satterthwaite sat down opposite the young man. He felt a sudden sense of exultation, as though he

were caught up and made part of a shimmering pattern of events.

He knew now what Mr. Quin had meant that evening at the opera—there was a drama going on and in it was a part, an important part for Mr. Satterthwaite.

He sat down opposite Philip Eastney with the sense of accomplishing the inevitable. It was easy enough to get into conversation. Eastney seemed anxious to talk. Mr. Satterthwaite was, as always, an encouraging and sympathetic listener. They talked of the war, of explosives, of poison gases. Eastney had a lot to say about these last, for during the war he had been engaged in their manufacture.

There was one gas, Eastney said, that had never been tried. One sniff of it was deadly. He warmed to animation as he spoke.

Having broken the ice Mr. Satterthwaite gently turned the conversation to music. Eastney's thin face lit up. He spoke with the passion and abandon of the real music lover. They discussed Yoaschbim and the young man was enthusiastic. Both he and Mr. Satterthwaite agreed that nothing on earth could surpass a really fine tenor voice. Eastney as a boy had heard Caruso and had never forgotten it.

"Do you know that he could sing to a wineglass and shatter it?" he demanded. "The thing's quite possible. It's a question of resonance."

He went into technical details. The subject seemed to fascinate him and Mr. Satterthwaite noted that he seemed to have a thorough grasp of what he was talking about.

The older man realized that he was talking to an exceptional brain, a brain that might almost be described as that of a genius.

And he thought of Charlie Burns and wondered at Gillian West.

It was with a start that he realized how late it was getting and he called for his bill. Eastney looked slightly apologetic.

"I'm ashamed of myself—running on so," he said. "But I—I needed some one to talk to this evening."

He ended the speech with a curious little laugh. His eyes were still blazing with some subdued excitement. Yet there was something tragic about him.

"It has been a pleasure," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "Our conversation has been most interesting."

He made his odd courteous little bow and passed out of the restaurant. The night was a warm one and as he walked slowly down the street an odd fancy came to him. He had the feeling that he was not alone.

Some one was walking beside him down that dark quiet street, someone he could not see. He wondered what it was that brought the figure of Mr. Quin before his mind.

But the thought of Mr. Quin persisted and with it came something else—a need, an urgency of some kind. There was something he must do—and do quickly.

If he could only have asked Mr. Quin—but even as the thought flashed through his mind he knew it was wrong. It was never any use

asking Mr. Quin anything. "The threads are all in your hands"—that was the thing Mr. Quin would say.

The threads. Threads of what? He analyzed his own feelings and impressions carefully. That presentiment of danger—whom did it threaten?

At once a picture rose up before his eyes, a picture of Gillian West sitting alone, listening to the radio.

Mr. Satterthwaite flung a penny to a passing newspaper boy and snatched at a paper. Yoaschbim was broadcasting tonight, he noted with interest. He was singing, *Salve, Dimora* from *Faust* and afterward a selection of his folk songs—the *Shepherd's Song*, the *Fish*, the *Little Deer*, et cetera.

Mr. Satterthwaite crumpled the paper. The knowledge of what Gillian was listening to seemed to make the picture of her clearer. Sitting there alone . . .

An odd request, that of Philip Eastney's. Not like the man, not like him at all. He was a dangerous man, perhaps a . . .

Again his thoughts brought up short. *A dangerous man*—that meant something. "*The threads are all in your hands*"—that meeting with Philip Eastney tonight had been rather—odd. A lucky chance, Eastney had said. Was it chance—or was it part of that interwoven design of which Mr. Satterthwaite had been conscious that evening?

He cast his mind back. There must be *something* in Eastney's conversation, some clew there. What had he talked about? Singing, war work, Caruso.

He caught his breath. Caruso, singing to a wineglass and the wineglass breaking. Yoaschbim singing in the London studio and, in a room over a mile away, the crash and tinkle of glass—not a wineglass but a thin green glass beaker. A crystal soap bubble falling, a soap bubble that was perhaps not empty.

It was at that moment that Mr. Satterthwaite, as judged by passers-by, suddenly went mad. He tore open the newspaper once more, took a brief glance at the radio announcements, then began to run for his life.

He found a crawling taxi, his head a jumble of fragmentary thoughts. Resonance—natural periods—if the period—something about a suspension bridge, soldiers marching over it and the swing of their stride being the same as the period of the bridge. Eastney had studied the subject. Eastney knew. And Eastney was a genius.

At ten forty-five Yoaschbim was to broadcast. It was that now. Yes, but the *Faust* had to come first. It was the *Shepherd's Song* with the great shout after the refrain that would—that would—do what?

His mind went whirling round again. Tones—overtones—halftones. He didn't know much about these things—but Eastney knew.

The taxi stopped. Mr. Satterthwaite flung himself out and raced up the stone stairs. The door of the flat was ajar and the great tenor voice welcomed him.

"*Shepherd, see thy horse's flowing mane*—"

He was in time then. He burst

open the sitting-room door. Gillian was sitting there in a tall chair by the fireplace.

"Barya Mischa's daughter is to wed to-day,

To the wedding I must haste away."

She must have thought him mad. He clutched at her, crying out something incomprehensible, half-pulled, half-dragged her out.

"To the wedding I must haste away,

Ya-ha!"

A wonderful high note, full-throated, powerful, hit full in the middle, a note any singer might be proud of. And with it another sound, the tinkle of broken glass.

A stray cat darted past them and in through the flat door. Gillian made a movement to follow but Mr. Satterthwaite held her back.

* * * * *

Philip Eastney drew out his watch and looked at it. For three-quarters of an hour he had been pacing the Embankment. He stared out over the Thames and then turned—to look into the face of his dinner companion.

"That's odd," he said and laughed. "We seem fated to run into each other to-night."

"If you call it fate," said Mr. Satterthwaite.

Philip Eastney looked at him more attentively. "Yes?"

Mr. Satterthwaite went straight to the point. "I have just come from Miss West's flat."

"Yes?"

"We have—taken a dead cat out of it."

There was silence, then Eastney said, "Who are you?"

Mr. Satterthwaite recited the whole history of events. "So you see, I was in time," he ended up. He paused and added quite gently, "Have you anything to—say?"

He expected something, some outburst, some wild justification. But nothing at all came. "No," said Philip Eastney quietly. He turned on his heel and walked away.

Mr. Satterthwaite roused himself and began to walk in the same direction as Eastney. A fog was beginning to come up. Presently he met a policeman, who looked at him suspiciously.

"Did you hear a kind of splash just now?" asked the policeman.

"No," said Mr. Satterthwaite.

The policeman was peering out over the river. "Another of these suicides, I expect."

"I suppose," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "that they have their reasons."

"Money, mostly," said the policeman. "Sometimes it's a woman. It's not always their fault but some women cause a lot of trouble."

"Some women," agreed Mr. Satterthwaite softly.

When the policeman had gone on he sat down on a seat and thought about Helen of Troy. He wondered if she were a nice ordinary woman blessed or cursed with a wonderful face.

Next—

The big news about our next issue is a brand-new short novel by Fredric Brown entitled THE PICKLED PUNKS. Mr. Brown's first mystery book, THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT, earned him one of the coveted Mystery Writers of America Edgars (an Edgar is the annual MWA award for excellence and consists of a bust of the late Edgar Allan Poe). Since then he has gone right on turning out winner after winner and is now justly famed as one of the ablest and perhaps the most original of active crime fiction authors.

PUNKS is a short version of Mr. Brown's newest yet-to-be-published novel and presents a dramatic and savagely intricate pattern of violence against a rough vital carnival background. Brown devotees know how well he knows the eerie grotesqueries of the midway and sideshow tent. We are proud to be the first to publish this brilliant and terrifying tale.

And Leslie Charteris will be very much present with the most recent of the Saint's adventures during his current European jaunt, THE ANGEL'S EYE. This story finds Simon Templar in the Netherlands—and of course there are both a lovely lady and lots of loot to win and certain individuals of vast evil lurking about to make his visit interesting.

These are but two out of a whole cell-block of mysteries, culled from the finest mystery fiction, written by the finest mystery authors, of yesterday, today and tomorrow, which will be awaiting you in our next edition. All in all we can promise an exciting and interesting issue.

—The Editor.

To my way of thinking the Saint Detective Story Magazine is a natural. Certainly there is no more widely known and beloved character in present-day mystery fiction than Simon Templar, alias the Saint. And certainly there is no man alive more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a mystery magazine than Simon's creator.

In his densely populated life, Leslie Charteris has been a lot of things—among them a student, a seaman, a rubber planter, a tin miner, a pearl fisher, a gold miner, a world traveler, a British subject and an American citizen. For most of his adult life, however, he has been a fantastically successful spinner of mystery stories—and he has been a student of crime fiction ever since he learned how to read.

Currently a resident of Hollywood, when not engaged in traveling as the spirit moves him, Charteris has seen himself, wearing the guise of debonair Simon Templar, appear in scores of books and hundreds of magazines, in dozens of movies, on the radio and currently in a hugely-syndicated comic strip. Appearing as Charteris, he has edited some of the most distinguished anthologies of mystery tales to appear in recent years.

Make no mistake, Charteris and the Saint are oddly interchangeable—for like Simon, his author is casual and languid and manages to look like a Louis Quinze courtier even in huaraches and Bermuda shorts. It seems probable that Simon is actually the person Charteris sees when he looks in the shaving mirror. He is one of the few men in history who has been able to make a fortune out of his own reverie.

Apart from the two-in-one phase of his existence, however, Charteris is an editor of shrewd and unerring taste. Which is why I have for years wanted him to edit a detective-story magazine—which is why this newest version of THE SAINT.

—The Publisher